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We Can't Be as Bad as All That!

A Play of English Society

IN

THREE ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

"You may distinguish them by a favorite phrase: 'Surely we are not so bad,' and the remark: 'If that is human nature, save us from it.' As if it could be done."

GEORGE MEREDITH.

NEW YORK
PRIVATELY PRINTED
1910

Dear Mr Macgowan

faithfully yrs

Henry Arthur Jones

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Copyright, 1910
By
HENRY ARTHUR JONES

PR
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PERSONS REPRESENTED

Mrs. Engaine

Lady Carnforth

Lady Katherine Greenop

Violet Engaine (*Mrs. Engaine's step-daughter*)

Mrs. Fred Chinnery

Fanny Chirk (*a society journalist*)

Bickmore (*Mrs. Engaine's maid*)

Sir Ralph Newell (*Lady Carnforth's cousin*)

Fulks Bissett (*Lady Carnforth's brother*)

Topham Bargeny

Harry Stackpool

Lord Carnforth

Toller (*a private inquiry agent*)

Marsh

572581

The scene is the drawing-room at Quarnby Royal, Lord Carnforth's place in the West Midlands. The time is late August. The first act takes place on Sunday morning after church, the second on the following Tuesday night, and the third on the Wednesday afternoon.

ACT I

SCENE. *The drawing-room at Quarnby Royal,* LORD CARNFORTH'S *place. A very handsome room in an English mansion. At back, right and left, are French windows opening on a terrace and showing beyond a lawn and a stretch of English landscape in August. All along right is a conservatory with two openings into it. Up stage left is a fireplace. Down stage left is a door.* MRS. FRED CHINNERY *and* HARRY STACKPOOL *enter from terrace. She is a good-looking woman about thirty, well dressed in a very elegant outdoor summer toilet. He is a charming, handsome, well-bred Englishman about forty, in summer morning dress. He is carrying a gilt-edged prayer-book in ivory.*

STACK

(*Yawning behind her back*)

YOUR prayer-book!

MRS. C.

(*Turning round, taking the book*)

Yawning? My company!

STACK

No. I'm yawning off that sermon.

MRS. C.

(*Reprovingly*)

Harry, you're making love to Lady Carnforth!

STACK

My dear Alice, what next?

MRS. C.

I watched you all through church. You kept on throwing her your wicked, hopeless look.

STACK

My wicked, hopeless look?

MRS. C.

The look you used to throw at me before— The look you always throw at your victims. It gets more wicked and more hopeless the more sure you are of winning them.

STACK

I haven't looked at Lady Carnforth, except as I should look at any charming woman who happened to be my hostess.

MRS. C.

(*Significantly*)

I've happened to be your hostess. It's too bad of you, Harry! You might have the decency to keep it from me. Suppose I were to give Carnforth a hint!

STACK

You surely won't do that! Upon my honour, Alice, you are the only woman—

[*Approaching her very tenderly*

MRS. C.

(*Repulsing him*)

Oh, please not that old stuff! I've a great mind to cut you completely, Harry!

STACK

(*Very winningly*)

You won't have the heart to do that!

MRS. C.

I would if I were five years younger, and if I wasn't so horribly hard up.

STACK

Poor old girl!

MRS. C.

Why did I go to Goodwood? And last night! I lost six rubbers one after the other! Six!

STACK

It's monstrous of Providence to pack the cards against one poor little woman like that. How much would tide you over?

MRS. C.

Don't ask me! Five hundred pounds. I never slept a wink.

STACK

(*Touching her hand affectionately*)

Well, you can sleep to-night!

MRS. C.

Harry! You won't think anything the worse of me?

STACK

Not at all!

MRS. C.

You're sure? You know, Harry, I do mean to go straight.

STACK

I'm sure you do. I never met a man or woman who didn't.

MRS. C.

No, don't jest! I really mean it! There never was a woman more naturally inclined to go straight than I am. Only everything happens to prevent it. The awful hands I had last night! Then you will help me?

STACK

Delighted!

MRS. C.

God bless you! You know, Harry, I've never really cared for anyone but you. When could you let me have it?

STACK

To-day's Sunday. Thursday morning?

MRS. C.

It is good of you. You don't know how worried I've been. And I owe forty pounds to that old cat—

STACK

Lady K.?

MRS. C.

Yes. She kept glaring at me in the sermon as if she were saying, "I know I shall never get my money!"

STACK

Hush! Here she is!

[LADY KATHERINE GREENOP (*pronounced Grinup*) *and* TOPHAM BARGENY *have appeared on terrace outside the left window.*

STACK

Ah! (*Going up to window.*) There are all the others— [*Going off.*

MRS. C.

(*Seizing his arm*)

No, you're not to go running after Lady Carnforth, just when I've allowed you to help me out of my troubles.

[*She draws him into the conservatory by the upper door as* LADY K. *and* BARGENY *enter from veranda left.* LADY K. *is a sharp-featured, witty old woman about seventy, very bright, keen and alert. She is also in church dress and carries a rather large old prayer-book. She is followed by* TOPHAM BARGENY, *a flabby, gossiping old scamp about sixty-five, with short breath and a wheezy-cackling voice and laugh. He also carries a prayer-book which he puts down on the table with a sense of relief.*

BARGENY

Thank God, that's all over till next Sunday!

LADY K.

(*In a rather high penetrating voice*)

Why do you go to church if you don't like it?

BARGENY

Well—Carnforth expects his guests to turn up. Poor old Carnforth! He don't like most of the people his wife brings down here, but he behaves very well about it and don't interfere, so I think we ought to oblige him in a little matter like going to church.

LADY K.

So you went to church to oblige Carnforth?

BARGENY

I suppose I did. If it comes to that, why did any of us go?

LADY K.

I went because I was told it was my duty when I was three years old. Carnforth went because he'd got the big family pew. Lady Carnforth went to flirt with Harry Stackpool. Sir Ralph went to flirt with Mrs. Engaine. Fulks Bissett went to flirt with Miss Engaine. Harry Stackpool went to flirt with any woman who'd let him, and Mrs. Fred Chinnery went to stop Harry Stackpool from flirting with anybody.

BARGENY

(*Very confidential. Drawing nearer to her*)

Strictly between ourselves—have you noticed Mrs. Fred's play at bridge?

LADY K.

I keep my hand up, and sit well away from her.

BARGENY

Yes, but her other little dodges. One can stand a bit of cheating in a pretty woman, but with Mrs. Fred—it's too thick. How much does she owe you?

LADY K.

Forty pounds.

BARGENY

She owes me seventeen. And she always forgets her bridge debts.

LADY K.

And never remembers the others.

BARGENY

How does she keep it up?

(*Drawing a little nearer*)

Who pays the rent of that flat in Piccadilly?

LADY K.

Not her husband!

[*Enter from terrace* MISS FANNY CHIRK, *a society journalist, about thirty-five, well-dressed, smart, shallow, chattering, insincere.* BARGENY *takes up a society paper from the table.*

FANNY

What a heavenly morning! And what a heavenly old church! Didn't you thoroughly enjoy the service, Lady K.?

LADY K.

I felt—heavenly. We all felt—heavenly.

FANNY

Ah! You make the "Butterfly" your Sunday reading, Mr. Bargeny?

BARGENY

I'm just seeing what you've got to say about us all, Miss Chirk.

LADY K.

Not the truth, I hope!

BARGENY

(*Reading*)

"Lord and Lady Carnforth have been entertaining a succession of distinguished guests at Quarnby Royal. The Prince and Princess de Chalencon and Diana, Lady Berminster left last Monday. The house party remaining includes Lady Katherine Greenop, Sir Ralph

Newell, Mr. Fulks Bissett, Mr. Topham Bargeny, Mr. Harry Stackpool, Mrs. Fred Chinnery—"

LADY K.

Is that arrangement quite correct, my dear?

FANNY

What do you mean?

LADY K.

Is it quite certain what lady's name ought to be placed next to Harry Stackpool?

FANNY

Dear Lady K., you are too dreadfully omniscient. Do tell me!

[HARRY STACKPOOL *and* MRS. CHINNERY *saunter in from conservatory.*

LADY K.

How can I, my dear, when Harry himself doesn't know for ten minutes together?

STACK

Butterfly been saying anything about me?

LADY K.

How could it? The Butterfly is family reading.

BARGENY

(*Reading*)

"The latest arrivals at Quarnby are Mrs. Engaine and her charming young step-daughter Miss Engaine who inherits vast estates in the Wild West from her late father. During the few months she has been in England Miss Engaine has won all hearts—"

LADY K.

Especially the dilapidated one belonging to Fulks Bissett.

BARGENY

(*Reading*)

"On Tuesday Sir Ralph Newell motored up to town and brought Mrs. Engaine and her step-daughter to Quarnby. Sir Ralph it will be remembered is Lady

Carnforth's cousin. He has spent the last ten years in Argentina, and has lately returned to England in consequence of his unexpected succession to the old baronetcy, which dates from George the First."

[LADY CARNFORTH *has entered from terrace. She is a pale striking looking woman, with clear cut features, a rather distant commanding manner; a restless disappointed look. She is also in a handsome Sunday morning dress.*

BARGENY

(*Throwing the paper on the table*)

And that's all Miss Chirk has got to say about us this week.

LADY K.

(*To Fanny*)

You haven't given us any particulars about Mrs. Engaine.

FANNY

I haven't any to give, and I can't find anybody who has.

LADY K.

You said in last week's Butterfly that she looked remarkably well in pale green. That can't be all her history. Something else must have happened to her.

BARGENY

(*Puzzling*)

Her face keeps on reminding me of something or somebody. I've either met her before, or I've met somebody very much like her.

LADY K.

(*To* LADY C.)

What do you know about her, Elinor?

LADY C.

Nothing except that she's Mrs. Engaine. Ralph came over with her from America in the Spring and got me to ask her down here.

MRS. C.

One didn't meet her anywhere in the season.

FANNY

Oh, yes. I met her at several very good receptions.

MRS. C.

She wasn't presented.

LADY K.

There are virtuous persons who don't go to Court.

STACK

An American, and not presented!

LADY K.

There are virtuous Americans who don't go to Court.

LADY C.

Mrs. Engaine isn't American. She told me she lived in England until she was twenty.

MRS. C.

She has a curious accent. It isn't American, is it?

BARGENY

Bit foreign, ain't it?

FANNY

She has very good manners.

STACK

Is there much difference between good American manners and good English manners?

BARGENY

Well, there's a difference in style, ain't there?

STACK

I often have to blush for my countrymen's manners.

LADY K.

I often have to blush for their morals.

STACK

Does that hurt you very much?

LADY K.

Not at all. I only do it as a matter of form. Bad

morals don't matter. Anybody might have them. But bad manners are inexcusable.

FANNY

How is it that all the charming people one meets have bad morals?

LADY K.

Don't say that, Miss Chirk. Mr. Stackpool gets too many compliments as it is.

BARGENY

I fancy the Americans have rather got the pull of us in the matter of morals, eh?

FANNY

But Mrs. Engaine isn't American. Oh, will nobody tell me who and what she is?

MRS. C.

I suppose there must have been a Mr. Engaine?

STACK

American husbands don't count, do they?

LADY K.

Oh, yes, Harry—you're thinking of English husbands.

BARGENY

Who was Mr. Engaine?

STACK.

As he was an American, he must have been a millionaire.

BARGENY

I suppose the gal has got most of the money, Lady Carnforth?

LADY C.

Miss Engaine will be very rich, I believe.

FANNY

She is to have these big estates out West. I got that much out of her.

LADY C.

I should think Mrs. Engaine has been left very well off.

MRS. C.

She must be, from her jewels.

FANNY

Yes, that pearl necklace she wore last night! Did you ever see anything so lovely?

MRS. C.

And the emeralds the night before! It's indecent of her to flaunt a jeweller's shop before starving wretches like myself.

LADY C.

She showed me some splendid diamonds that she hasn't worn yet.

LADY K.

She'd better keep them locked up. The emeralds nearly turned me green.

MRS. C.

If I see any more of her jewellery, I shall be a socialist and grab it.

BARGENY

Did Mrs. Engaine say anything about her people, or where she'd been brought up?

LADY C.

No—only that she'd lived in England till she was twenty.

FANNY

Still we don't know anything about her.

LADY K.

Yes—she looks remarkably well in pale green. And she stands a very good chance of being Lady Newell.

MRS. C.

I suppose we shall know more about her before that happens.

LADY C.

Ralph hasn't said anything to me about it.

MRS. C.

But it's pretty plain, isn't it?

FANNY

They went off together after church. They haven't come back yet.

[*Enter from veranda* LORD CARNFORTH, *a dry, dignified, correct Englishman about forty-five.*

LORD C.

Excellent weather for the harvest. I've been looking round the home farm.

FANNY

What a heavenly country all round Quarnby, Lord Carnforth!

LORD C.

Yes, it's looking remarkably well just now. The farmers are complaining about the roots.

LADY K.

Have you seen anything of Sir Ralph and Mrs. Engaine?

LORD C.

They went over the footbridge into the fir woods.

BARGENY

(*Who has been puzzling*)

No! I can't place her!

STACK.

Mrs. Engaine? I can place her for you, Top. A woman of thirty with a temperament, whatever that may mean; apparently very rich; certainly very charming; certainly very well bred whether English or American or foreign; certainly very well dressed; with a history rich in all sorts of glorious possibilities, and even probabilities. What more do you want to know?

BARGENY

I want to know who she is, and where I've come across her.

STACK.

You want to ruin all our illusions about her, you old reprobate!

LORD C.

(*Who has been listening with some apprehension*)

I hope Elinor, before asking Mrs. Engaine down here you satisfied yourself that she is—a—the sort of person we wish to know.

LADY C.

Oh, yes, perfectly.

LORD C.

There are so many new people now, it's getting very difficult to say whether some of them are exactly the sort of people one would choose to know.

LADY K.

She looks remarkably well in pale green.

LORD C.

Yes, and she seemed very attentive in church.

STACK.

That was rather rough on the rest of us.

LADY K.

I took it as a personal reproof.

LORD C.

You didn't care about the sermon?

LADY K.

I was horribly bored. Weren't you?

LORD C.

Yes, I was rather bored. Still I thought it quite a good average sermon.

LADY K.

Average sermons are boring.

LORD C.

I don't think we make sufficient allowance for clergymen.

STACK.

No, poor devils, they're having a bad time of it just now. What are they to talk about? Politics are barred, except to Dissenters; and we don't want to

copy them and turn the church into an election shop. Dogma is dull and dry, and morals are improper. Besides the parsons know half of us wouldn't stand any ragging, and the other half would apply it to their neighbours. So there's nothing left but a bright musical service, with a little pleasant harmless twaddle to wind up.

LORD C.

(*Rising; he is a little offended but is too well-bred to expostulate*)

In these democratic times I don't think we ought to criticise the clergy. Isn't it nearly time for lunch?

[*Going towards door left.*

[MARSH, *the butler, has entered left.*

MARSH

(*Addressing* LADY C.)

If you please, your ladyship, we've had an accident in the kitchen. Lunch will be delayed, my lord.

LORD C.

Oh, very well, Marsh. We shall meet at lunch, shan't we?

[*Exit left.*

MARSH

I beg pardon, my lady, could you consult with Mrs. Beecher?

LADY C.

I'll come. You must amuse yourselves meantime.

[*Exit left followed by* MARSH.

FANNY

Dear Lady K., you might be sweet enough to come upstairs and give me those particulars for my new book.

LADY K.

My dear, if you want any really atrocious stories about mid-Victorian times you had better consult Mr. Bargeny. He was in his prime then.

STACK.

What is this book of yours, Miss Chirk?

FANNY

Well, the real history of a time is never written by the professional historians, is it?

STACK.

Never!

FANNY

A true picture of any age is only to be obtained from private memoirs and personal gossip and letters.

STACK.

And you propose to give a true picture of mid-Victorian times?

FANNY

Well, there's a great deal of curiosity just now about the private lives and love affairs of certain well-known people.

STACK.

And that's just what these professional historians always leave out—the dishonest shirkers!

MRS. C.

I think such subjects should be left alone. Surely, surely when two human beings have loved each other the least we can do is to pass by their—lapses with respect, and sympathy, and silence.

LADY K.

Respect, and sympathy certainly—but silence? No! That isn't the way they treat our—lapses.

BARGENY

What are you going to call your book, Miss Chirk?

FANNY

I want a good striking title, something like—"Noble ladies who loved too well."

STACK.

If I might humbly suggest, "Strayed sheep from the Victorian Fold," or "A Bunch of regular Bad 'uns."

LADY K.

Too long, Harry, why not simply "Lapses"?

BARGENY

"Lapses and Col-Lapses".

FANNY

Oh, never mind the title! I want you all to help me with the body of the book.

STACK.

Isn't "body" too gross a term to apply to the spiritual experiences of these ladies?

MRS. C.

(*Reproachfully*)

Harry!

FANNY

Dear Lady K., do come upstairs and tell me all about that affair of Mrs. Tarbolton's.

STACK.

Why can't we all hear about Mrs. Tarbolton?

LADY K.

She is not a person to be heard about. She is for private contemplation only.

STACK.

But she was my godmother, and if her conduct won't bear inspection, I want to know all about it.

MRS. C.

You aren't to jest about things that ought to be sacred to you. Come and see my new golf set—

[*Taking him off left.*

STACK.

(*Going off*)

Miss Chirk, the true story of my great aunt Arabella is quite unmentionable. I will confide it to you.

MRS. C.

Come along!

[*Exit left followed by* STACKPOOL.

FANNY

Dear Lady K., don't waste the precious moments. Come and tell me about Mrs. Tarbolton.

LADY K.

(*Going to door left*)

Topham, you'd better fish up the more respectable of your recollections for Miss Chirk.

[*Exit left followed by* FANNY.

BARGENY

[*Throws down the Butterfly, which he has again taken up, rises, yawns stretches himself, goes up towards window and meets* MRS. ENGAINE *and* SIR RALPH NEWELL, *who enter.* MRS. ENGAINE *is about thirty, well dressed, interesting, graceful, sympathetic, sweet voiced.* SIR RALPH NEWELL *is about forty; strong, well-built, manly, with a healthy weather-dyed complexion. His early good English breeding shows through a later coating of rough plain earnest manners, which he has acquired in ten years, knocking about in South America.*

BARGENY

(*To* MRS. E.)

Had a pleasant walk?

MRS. E.

Oh, yes. I hope we aren't late for lunch.

BARGENY

(*Watching her keenly but unobtrusively*)

No. They've had an accident in the kitchen. It's put off for half an hour.

[MRS. E *and* SIR R. *come down.* BARGENY *goes up to terrace and is going off, but stops, turns to look at her again.*

MRS. E.

Have you seen anything of Violet and Mr. Bissett?

BARGENY

They came in twenty minutes ago. I believe they're in the billiard room.

[*She has turned from him. He looks at her again. He shows that he is taxing his memory to recall her; makes a gesture of vexation; then his face shows a sudden enlightenment, and with a little gesture of satisfaction he goes off at the window.*

MRS. E.

What a beautiful world it is!

SIR R.

Isn't it?

MRS. E.

And England is like one great rich old garden!

SIR R.

Yes, one finds that out when one gets back to it.

MRS. E.

You've been away for a long while?

SIR R.

Ten years.

MRS. E.

You're glad to be home again?

SIR R.

Yes, for many things; but I don't seem to fit in.

MRS. E.

How's that?

SIR R.

Everybody and everything seems to have changed. My cousin Elinor—she was a delicate, refined girl, just engaged to Carnforth—very reserved and standoffish —look at the set she has got down here now!

MRS. E.

Some of them aren't very nice.

SIR R.

Nice? When old Lady K. and Top Bargeny begin to squirt their dirty gossip over everything and everybody, along with that society scavenger Miss Chirk—I feel I want to bring in a dozen old sailors to rap out a few good decent wholesome oaths.

MRS. E.

Oh, they only say these wicked and cruel things because they wish to be clever, not because they mean them.

SIR R.

I'm glad you aren't like them.

[*Approaching her tenderly.*

MRS. E.

(*Drawing a little away from him*)

No. I'm not clever.

SIR R.

Not in that sense! You're so different from all these little creatures.

[*Again approaching her tenderly.*

MRS. E.

(*Again drawing away, but showing great delight at his words*)

Am I? In what way?

SIR R.

I've never heard you say the least unkind or mean or selfish thing about anybody.

MRS. E.

You've heard me say very little about anybody.

SIR R.

No, but all you have said has been so sweet and wise. You're so different from all the women I have ever met.

MRS. E.

You think so? Now I'm sure you know very little about me.

SIR R.

Tell me something. You're English?

MRS. E.

Yes.

SIR R.

And you've been away from England a long while?

MRS. E.

Yes.

SIR R.

How long?

MRS. E.

About the same time as yourself—ten years.

SIR R.

And all that time you've been in North America?

MRS. E.

Yes—nearly.

SIR R.

And all that time I've been in South America.

MRS. E.

What took you out there?

SIR R.

Oh, I was brought up in the usual way—Eton and Oxford and so on. I had a pretty easy time till I was twenty-five. Then I went into Parliament, not because I liked it, or because I was fitted for it—

MRS. E.

Then why did you go?

SIR R.

My people wished it, and I had a very dear old chum who was making his way and getting to the top—

MRS. E.

Who was that?

SIR R.

Harold Furnival. I daresay you remember?

MRS. E.

I haven't taken much notice of English politics.

SIR R.

The most brilliant fellow, and the dearest chap that ever breathed. Everybody loved him—took all the honours at Oxford—he'd have been in the next Cabinet—nothing could have stopped him—you must have heard his name?

MRS. E.

I remember—something. Did he die?

SIR R.

Yes. It's rather a painful story.

MRS. E.

Then don't tell it to me this beautiful morning. You left Parliament?

SIR R.

I left everything. My poor old dad went all to smash in South African speculations. I had to cut England and find out how far a few Greek and Latin roots would carry me in Argentina.

MRS. E.

You had a hard time?

SIR R.

Awful at first. But it's good to look back on. I buckled to and roughed it, and the last few years everything turned up trumps. I'd just settled down comfortably for life, when my Uncle Jim got gout at the heart, my Cousin Tom broke his neck, and his little chap went off with whooping cough—all in two months. So I dropped in for the old place and the title. I had to come back to England—lucky wasn't it I came by New York?

MRS. E.

Why?

SIR R.

I met you. And now—

MRS. E.

Now?

SIR R.

I'm hesitating whether I shall go back to Argentina, or settle down and take up my place in the county, perhaps go into Parliament again—

MRS. E.

Surely there's no life in the world like an English country gentleman's!

SIR R.

I thought so at one time. I should think so again, if you—

MRS. E.

If I—?

SIR R.

If you think so. You shall advise me—

MRS. E.

Oh, I couldn't. You must decide your own life.

SIR R.

No, you will decide my future life. You understand me, don't you? (*She is silent*) Mrs. Engaine—I don't even know your Christian name—

MRS. E.

I don't think I will understand you.

SIR R.

Yes you must. I'll put it more plainly. I love you as a man can love who has had to put all that aside, and now meets the very woman he wants, the very woman who was made for him, and finds he can offer her all his best years, all his best manhood, all his best feelings. I'll stay in England and take up any career you wish, if you'll be my wife. There! You understand that, don't you?

[*Her face has been turned from him. She has listened with great delight and pride.*

MRS. E.

(*Turns to him*)

It will save you pain if I won't understand you. Try to think you haven't said it, and I'll try to think I haven't heard.

SIR R.

No, I can't meet you now as we have been meeting.

MRS. E.

Why not? I still wish to have you for a friend.

SIR R.

Friend? Is friendship all you can give me?

MRS. E.

Yes, all—at any rate for the present.

SIR R.

For the present? Then I may hope?

MRS. E.

No. I mustn't say that. Will you let it rest there?

SIR R.

It's like asking for bread and getting a stone. Yes, I'll be your friend—for the present.

[*Holding out his hand.*

MRS. E.

(*Taking his hand*)

Thank you.

SIR R.

You might throw me a crumb, and tell me your Christian name?

MRS. E.

(*After a slight pause*)

Evadne.

SIR R.

It's a pretty name, and it's like you. Evadne!

[*Pronouncing it softly.*

MRS. E.

(*Withdrawing her hand*)

And now I wonder if I might ask something of your friendship?

SIR R.

You know you may.

MRS. E.

It's about Violet. Her father came of an old English family, and he wanted her to settle in the old country. So I really came to England for her sake.

SIR R.

She told me on the boat she was coming over to have a good time.

MRS. E.

Yes—I don't quite know what that means—

SIR R.

Neither do I, and I don't think the girls themselves do. But it's what they're all after.

MRS. E.

I want her to be very happy. Her father left her in my charge, and I promised him I'd carry out his wishes. But it's more than that. I've grown to love her very dearly for her own sake. We've been much together—alone—and one must have something to cling to—

SIR R.

(*Approaching her tenderly*)

If you feel that,—

MRS. E.

(*Drawing away*)

Ah no! Please no! I mean women love each other, and hate each other more than men do, don't you think?

SIR R.

Well, "hate" perhaps. But no two women could be more devoted to each other than my old chum Harold Furnival and I were.

MRS. E.

(*Glances at him very searchingly for a moment, then goes on*)

Violet and I have been like sisters these last few

years. I've had all her confidence. She loves me very dearly I'm sure, but—

SIR R.

But?

MRS. E.

You must have noticed—Mr. Bissett—

SIR R.

Yes?

MRS. E.

He's paying her a lot of attention. I'm afraid Violet means to accept hmi.

SIR R.

Afraid? You don't like him?

MRS. E.

I know very little of him. You have so much better opportunities of judging.

SIR R.

Well Fulks is my cousin, and naturally Elinor doesn't wish me to queer his chances.

MRS. E.

I see. I oughtn't to have asked you.

SIR R.

Yes. What can I do to help you?

MRS. E.

Give me your advice. Violet is very young. She will be very rich—

SIR R.

You know Fulks hasn't got a penny. In fact, he's very much in debt.

MRS. E.

That wouldn't matter if I were sure he'd make her a good husband.

SIR R.

How far have you any control of her money?

MRS. E.

She can't marry without my consent till she's twenty-one. She's only just seventeen.

SIR R.

He's over thirty. And up to the present he has done nothing much, except bet on horses.

MRS. E.

Oh, I don't want her to make a mistake!

SIR R.

You think it would be a mistake?

MRS. E.

It's only my instinct. What ought I to do?

SIR R.

(*Significantly*)

I think you should follow your instinct.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

[*Enter left* VIOLET ENGAINE, *a very pretty impulsive girl of seventeen.*

VIO.

Oh, here you are, duckie! (*Beckons to* MRS. E.) Come along with me! I've got a little secret to whisper in your ear! (*Going towards window*) Sir Ralph, may I run away with her for five minutes?

SIR R.

Don't go, Miss Engaine. I'm just off myself. (*To* MRS. E.) I hope you will understand me before I leave Quarnby.

MRS. E.

Leave Quarnby?

SIR R.

I must, if you won't understand me.

[*Exit through window left.*

VIO.

Has anything happened?

MRS. E.

No. Now, what is this secret?

VIO.

(*Kissing her impulsively*)

There! And there! And there's another because you are such a darling. Now congratulate me!

MRS. E.

(*A little alarmed and reprovingly*)

Violet!

VIO.

No, that's not the right tone. I'm going to be the happiest girl on earth, and you merely refrigerate me with "Violet!"

MRS. E.

It's Mr. Bissett?

VIO.

(*Nods*)

He let me beat him at billiards, so I let him ask me to marry him.

MRS. E.

You haven't accepted him? (VIOLET *nods*) Without asking my consent?

VIO.

No, subject to your consent—if we can get it. We are to be married as soon as you'll let us—and sooner if you won't.

MRS. E.

(*Hurt*)

Violet!

VIO.

No! Don't refrigerate me! Kiss me, and congratulate me this instant.

MRS. E.

I can't! I must think it over.

[*Turns away hurt and grieved.* VIOLET *goes up to her and embraces her effusively.*

VIO.

Duckie, you aren't angry with me?

MRS. E.

No, dear, but very sorry.

VIO.

Sorry! Why? Duckie, if you don't say "yes" I shall have to be very horrid to you.

MRS. E.

But do you know what kind of man he is?

VIO.

Oh, he's the regulation bad lot. He said as much. And I've promised to reform him in the regulation way. We've seen to all that part of the business. Now, Duckie, you want me to be happy, don't you?

MRS. E.

You know I do!

VIO.

Then why do you hesitate?

MRS. E.

Because I love you, dear. Oh you don't know—

VIO.

What?

MRS. E.

What you have at stake! How should a girl know? She rushes at what she thinks is happiness—she won't listen—she won't be guided—she will have her own way—

VIO.

Well, when you were a girl, didn't you rush at what you thought was happiness?

MRS. E.

If I did, I had to pay for it.

VIO.

Duckie, you aren't much of a success as an awful warning!

MRS. E.

Oh, I can't have you make a mistake! It's all your life, Vi—

[Fulks Bissett *enters left, a dark, handsome, attractive man, rather over thirty, faultlessly dressed.*

Bissett

(*To* Vio.)

You've told Mrs. Engaine? (Vio. *nods*) I hope you won't stand in the way of our happiness?

Mrs. E.

Violet is very young. We must ask a little time to think it over. Vi, I want to speak to you—

[Lady Carnforth *enters left.*

Bissett

I'm going up to town for a day or two. I hope you'll let me consider it settled before I leave.

Mrs. E.

I'm afraid I can't. Violet!

[*Going up to window. Exit.*

Vio.

(*To* Bissett)

I shan't give her any peace till it is settled.

Exit at window.

Lady C.

Mrs. Engaine won't give her consent?

Bissett

She'll have to. If she don't, I shall get Violet to bolt with me.

Lady C.

No, Fulks, you mustn't do that.

Bissett

My dear girl, I've got to do something—and jolly soon.

Lady C.

I can't have the scandal of an elopement. They'd say I asked the girl here on purpose to bring it about.

BISSETT

So you did, didn't you? I don't care what they say so long as I marry the girl.

LADY C.

With your reputation you can't afford an elopement with a rich heiress of seventeen.

BISSETT

My reputation is pretty well battered, ain't it? A decent respectable elopement will just polish it up.

LADY C.

No, it won't. Your only chance it to marry her in the ordinary way with Mrs. Engaine's consent. You've always been a disgrace to us, Fulks—I want to give you a chance of getting straight again.

BISSETT

I'm perfectly ready to go straight on twenty thousand a year. But I must have it pretty soon.

LADY C.

But you won't have it pretty soon, if you marry without Mrs. Engaine's consent. You'll have to wait four years.

BISSETT

Oh, no, I shan't. Once it's known I've married the girl, I can keep my devils of creditors off me. Besides, Mrs. Engaine will come round and let Violet clear me. You can work that, can't you?

LADY C.

I'm doing all I can for you.

BISSETT

Can't you put a bit more screw on to her?

LADY C.

How?

BISSETT

Oh, I don't know. Promise you'll get her and Violet presented.

LADY C.

I have. It doesn't do to push things too much. We must take time.

BISSETT

Time?! I tell you I've got to have some money at once.

LADY C.

What do you mean—?

BISSETT

At once—if not sooner—down on the nail. I suppose you couldn't manage a few hundred straight off?

LADY C.

You know I can't. I'm terribly pressed myself and Carnforth gets more impossible every day. I want the money you owe me very badly.

BISSETT

(*Grins*)

Do you? Well you may whistle for it, if I don't marry Violet. But if I do, I'll pay up, and I tell you what, I'll give you a jolly big lift as well, old girl.

LADY C.

You will?

BISSETT

Yes.

LADY C.

How much?

BISSETT

Say five thousand for yourself, if you help me out of this mess.

LADY C.

How far are you in?

BISSETT

Up to my eyes. Lew Bernstein and all his pack are on to me, yelling for my blood. That's what I'm going up to town for.

LADY C.

What?

BISSETT

I've got to meet them at Lew's rooms to-night. I'm going to spend a happy Sunday evening.

LADY C.

Can't you tell them you're going to marry Miss Engaine?

BISSETT

I could. Lew would retort with his oily grin and ask to see it in the Morning Post. That's why I wanted to get Mrs. Engaine's consent to-day. I could have whipped the announcement into all the papers to-night and—Damn! (*Walking about desperately*) Look here old girl, if I don't get five or six hundred within a day or two I shall get posted at Tattersall's, and kicked out of my clubs. And that jolly well finishes me!

LADY C.

Fulks! What have you been doing?

BISSETT

Never mind. That's the situation in all its ghastly reality. Do you see any way out of it?

LADY C.

No, I don't. Do you?

BISSETT

Yes, if I can be dead sure of marrying Violet within a month. And you've got to help me, Elinor. You've got to! If you don't, I shall have to—

LADY C.

What are you going to do?

BISSETT

Get out of this holy mess somehow. (*Taking out watch*) These beastly Sunday trains! I've ordered the motor—

LADY C.

When shall you be back?

BISSETT

Can't say.

LADY C.

You'll be here to take Violet to the dance on Tuesday night?

BISSETT

Yes. If I haven't gone under meantime. (BARGENY *enters from terrace*) Good-bye, old girl! (*Kissing her*) Good-bye, Top.

BARGENY

Off somewhere, Fulks?

BISSETT

Going to have a look at Billy Canniper's Stable. He has got a horse that's going to pull off the Leger.

[*Exit left.*

BARGENY

(*Watches him off and then turns mysteriously to*

LADY C.)

I fancy I've placed her.

LADY C.

Placed who?

BARGENY

Mrs. Engaine. I'm not sure, but I think I've got her.

LADY C.

Who is she?

BARGENY

I believe she's the famous Nora Shard.

LADY C.

Nora Shard? The girl who ran away with Harold Furnival!

BARGENY

The very same. But I only saw her once, and before I commit myself, I should like to hunt up the affair and make sure!

LADY C.

(*After a pause*)

Top, you mustn't say a word of this to anyone.

BARGENY

Of course I won't. But as she's your guest I thought you ought to know.

LADY C.

Thanks. (*Deep in thought for a moment or two*) Thanks.

BARGENY

She told you she lived in England till she was twenty—she looks about thirty—and it's ten years since the Harold Furnival affair.

LADY C.

Yes.

BARGENY

You've had letters from her?

LADY C.

Two or three.

BARGENY

What does she sign herself?

LADY C.

Evadne. Sometimes only "E."

BARGENY

Well of course she wouldn't use the name "Nora."

LADY C.

No. (*Suddenly*) But if she were Nora Shard, Ralph would have recognized her!

BARGENY

Perhaps he never saw her.

LADY C.

Oh, he must—he was Harold Furnival's bosom friend.

BARGENY

I've got heaps of bosom friends, but I don't unbosom myself to them about pretty ladies.

LADY C.

We've nothing to go upon. We must keep very quiet and get to know more—

BARGENY

Tell you how we could make ourselves pretty sure.

LADY C.

How?

BARGENY

The first time we get them together, I'll lead up to Harold Furnival and the scandal, and get Ralph to talk about it. You put yourself where you can watch her face.

LADY C.

I don't suppose she'd betray herself.

BARGENY

Not outright perhaps. But she'd be almost sure to give some hint—

LADY C.

Yes, we'll try it.

BARGENY

[VIOLET *enters very excitedly at window, her face shows she has been crying a little. She is followed by* MRS. E. *and* SIR RALPH

VIO.

No, Sir Ralph, I know my duty, but I won't be lectured about it.

SIR R.

I'm sorry I spoke.

[*Turns to* MRS. E. *with a little gesture of hopelessness as much as to say "You see it's no good."*

VIO.

Where is Mr. Bissett? Has he gone to London yet?

LADY C.

I think not. He'll be starting directly.

VIO.

I must see him before he goes. (*Going left.* MRS.

ENGAINE *is following her.*) No, please don't follow me!

MRS. E.

Where are you going?

VIO.

Only going to say "Good-bye" to Mr. Bissett.

[*Exit left closing the door after her.*

LADY C.

(*To* MRS. E.)

I'm sorry you don't see your way to give your consent to my brother's engagement to Violet.

MRS. E.

I'm afraid I can't. Would it be better for us to leave Quarnby?

LADY C.

Oh, no! Fulks will be away for a day or two. Meantime let's hope everything will come right.

[BARGENY *behind* SIR RALPH *and* MRS. E., *makes a sign to* LADY C. *that he is about to sound* SIR R. LADY C. *responds with a nod of assent.*

LADY C.

(*To* MRS. E.)

Lunch won't be long. Won't you sit down?

[MRS. E. *sits, and* LADY C. *places herself where she can see* MRS. E.'s *face. During the following scene she watches* MRS. E. *very keenly, but unobtrusively.* BARGENY *also keeps a watch on* MRS. E. *out of the corners of his eyes.*

BARGENY

So it's all over with poor Teddy Boyce!

SIR R.

Who is Teddy Boyce? And what has happened to him?

BARGENY

Teddy is the latest example of that species of male lunatic who ruins himself for a woman. (MRS. ENGAINE *very slightly shows a keen interest, so slight as to be hardly discernible.*) Teddy has thrown up a splendid career at the Bar for the sake of a stout lady of forty summers, with golden hair—three shades too bright. Why do men do these things?

MRS. E.

Perhaps he really loved her, and was ready to make the sacrifice.

BARGENY

Poor old Teddy! Why do men do these things? Then there was Harold Furnival—(*Both* LADY C. *and* BARGENY *are watching* MRS. E. *very keenly as he pronounces the name, but she gives no sign.*) Did you ever happen to meet Nora Shard, Lady Carnforth?

LADY C.

Not that I remember. Did you?

BARGENY

I met her once under very peculiar circumstances. I was down at Folkestone for the Sunday at a little private hotel where I always stay. Coming out of my sitting-room I came face to face with Harold Furnival and a lady. I knew Harold very well, and I knew his wife. Good Lord! She was a cat! What a life she led poor Harold! Why do men marry such women? Well, I said "Good-day" to Harold, and I took as long a look at the lady as I could take without being rude—

LADY C.

And was she Nora Shard?

BARGENY

Well, she wasn't Mrs. Furnival. The next day I went back to town. First edition of the evening papers —"Resignation of Harold Furnival" on all the

placards. Bought a paper. Harold had thrown up his seat, retired from politics, and was going to live abroad. Went into the Club. Everybody agog with the news, with the additional item that Harold had eloped with a certain beautiful Miss Nora Shard, the daughter of his election agent at Mapleham.

LADY C.

I forget the particulars—wasn't there some tragedy?

BARGENY

Tragedy?! Rather! I went out of the Club, up Saint James's Street. Special edition of the evening papers "Death of Harold Furnival! Sensational details!" Bought another paper. Harold and Miss Shard had gone for a drive that morning, met a runaway horse and cart and had a smash. Harold was killed on the spot and Miss Shard escaped without a scratch. I went back to the Club and we moralized about it over a jolly good dinner, and a rubber.

LADY C.

What became of the girl?

BARGENY

I never heard. There was an inquest and she had to attend, poor girl, and give all the particulars—pretty hard lines on her. (*Looks up suddenly at* SIR R.) I'm awfully sorry, Ralph!

SIR R.

What for?

BARGENY

I forgot you and Harold were such cronies. I daresay you know more about Miss Shard than I do.

SIR R.

No, I never saw her.

LADY C.

Did you know anything about it, Ralph?

SIR R.

Yes. We needn't go into it now. Especially as

Mrs. Engaine doesn't want to hear sad stories this beautiful morning.

MRS. E.

Oh, I'm rather interested in this. You've provoked our curiosity.

SIR R.

Have I?

MRS. E.

You said you never met Miss Shard, and yet you know about her. Don't tell us, if it's painful.

SIR R.

It is rather, but it's ten years ago. And there isn't much to tell.

LADY C.

Then tell us.

SIR R.

I had to leave England after my father's smash. I'd already said good-bye to everybody, Harold included. Just as I was going to bed the last night, Harold came to my hotel from the House of Commons. He had just made a big speech and was flushed with it. I congratulated him. Then he told me it would be his last. I was thunderstruck, and asked him why. He said he'd met this girl some two or three years before and they'd fallen desperately in love with each other. He owed all his success to her influence. (MRS. ENGAINE *has sat quite calm and impassive, but at* SIR RALPH'S *words a shade of great pride passes over her face, and her eyes light up for a moment—then she sits impassive again and shows rather less interest than an unconcerned hearer would do*) He couldn't live without her. Politics, friends, wife, family, career, honour were nothing to him. He had just enough to live upon after making his wife comfortable, and he was going to throw up everything, take this Nora Shard abroad, and live with her and for her. And so he raved on. I told him he was mad. I argued with

him; I begged him; I rowed him; I chaffed him; I shook him; I locked him in the room and told him he shouldn't go till he had solemnly promised me to give her up.

MRS. E.

(*With apparent indifference*)

And I suppose he did?

SIR R.

Yes. I gradually brought him back to his senses, and at four in the morning he gave me his word of honour he'd never see her again.

BARGENY

Why on earth need he do that? Couldn't he have kept it quiet, and arranged with the girl?

SIR R.

Harold wasn't a man who could arrange to live a life of constant deceit. He said that the strain of it had been awful, and he'd rather cut his throat than stand it any longer. It must be either one thing or the other.

BARGENY

And it was the other?

SIR R.

Yes. I sailed the next morning. The first thing I saw on landing at Beunos Ayres, was a foreign news telegram posted up in the hotel. Harold had eloped with her and had been killed the next day. So the baggage must have got hold of him again!

[*At the word "baggage"* MRS. E. *winces, and then remains quiet.*

BARGENY

Don't call 'em baggages, Ralph! We call 'em prettier names than that when we're trying to make them—baggages.

SIR R.

I don't care what you call her. She made a fool of one of the finest fellows that ever lived, and then

ruined him. So call her what you like. Isn't it time for lunch, Elinor?

[*Going to door left.*

LADY C.

They've had an upset with the kitchen range. It can't be long now.

SIR R.

Poor old Harold! It was a terrible blow to his mother and sisters. I'm going to stay with them when I leave here.

[*Exit left.*

MRS. E.

(*Rises. Goes to back and looks off.* BARGENY *steals a look round at her, and then glances at* LADY C.)

LADY C.

I wonder what has become of the lady?

BARGENY

(*Significantly glancing round at* MRS. E. *who is standing with her back to them*) . .

Ah!

LADY C.

Should you know her again if you were to see her?

BARGENY

I'm not quite sure I should. You see I only caught sight of her once—

[*Enter left* BICKMORE, MRS. ENGAINE'S *maid, very much excited and a little scared.*

BICK.

(*To* MRS. E.)

I beg pardon, ma'am, can I speak to you?

MRS. E.

What is it, Bickmore?

BICK.

It's very important, ma'am—

MRS. E.

(*Alarmed*)

It's not Miss Engaine?!

BICK.

No, ma'am. Would you please come to your room for a moment, ma'am?

MRS. E.

Certainly.

[*Exeunt* MRS. E. *and* BICKMORE *left.* BARGENY *and* LADY C. *look at each other.*

BARGENY

Well? Guilty or not guilty?

LADY C.

What do you think?

BARGENY

I don't know. She didn't seem very interested in Nora Shard.

LADY C.

No, but naturally she would appear indifferent.

BARGENY

If she could—

LADY C.

Once or twice she did show interest—

BARGENY

She shied at "baggage".

LADY C.

Yes, but that may have been the word. It isn't a nice word.

BARGENY

No, it ain't, and women generally shy at words. They don't mind the things so much.

LADY C.

Top, you're outrageous! Well, we haven't proved anything.

BARGENY

No, we ain't much forrarder. But we can easily find out—

LADY C.

How?

BARGENY

Some of the illustrated papers had portraits of her and Harold Furnival. There was a picture of her giving evidence at the inquest. Tell you what I'll do—I'll get them looked up and have them sent down here.

LADY C.

Yes. Top as an old friend, you'll say nothing about it for the present?

BARGENY

Not a word. Not a word. All the same I'm pretty sure I'm right about the—a—"baggage."

[LADY K. *enters left.*

LADY K.

I wish I'd got so many jewels that I could afford to leave them about and lose them.

LADY C.

What do you mean?

LADY K.

Mrs. Engaine's pearl necklace has gone.

[*A sharp look of alarm passes over* LADY C.'s *face.*

BARGENY

By Jove!

LADY C.

Gone?! Where?

LADY K.

Somebody has mislaid it, or put it into his pocket—just for fun.

LADY C.

Are you sure?

LADY K.

My maid told me. Bickmore told her. They're

both shedding copious tears, and all the other servants are demanding that their trunks shall be searched. I didn't know there was so much blatant honesty in the house.

LADY C.

But Mrs. Engaine wore it last night—what did she do with it?

LADY K.

Bickmore put it into her jewel case, and locked it. This morning Mrs. Engaine left her keys on her dressing table, thinking the pearl necklace might come in useful to some deserving person. The deserving person thought so too—

LADY C.

Surely it can't be stolen—

BARGENY

Well some of us ain't much better than we should be, but we haven't come to that!

[*Enter* LORD CARNFORTH *left.*

LORD C.

Elinor, this is extremely awkward about Mrs. Engaine's necklace. We'd better send for a detective.

LADY C.

(*Alarmed*)

Detective? Certainly not. It can't be really lost. It must be mislaid somewhere.

[*Enter* MRS. ENGAINE *left.*

LADY C.

Dear Mrs. Engaine, I'm so sorry. Are you sure the necklace is lost?

MRS. E.

It has certainly gone—

LADY C.

But you don't think it has been—stolen?

MRS. E.

I can't understand. I remember Bickmore putting

it in the jewel box when she undressed me last night. Unfortunately, when I went to church I carelessly left my keys beside it on the table. When Bickmore went into my room ten minutes ago, she saw the keys lying beside the jewel box, and thought she would see that everything was safe. She opened the box—the necklace was gone.

[*Enter* FANNY CHIRK *left.*

FANNY

Dear Mrs. Engaine! It can't really be lost! Do tell me all about it. It was worth two thousand pounds, wasn't it?

MRS. E.

It was very valuable, but please don't make any fuss about it.

LADY C.

No, please not! I must beg that nothing is said till we have made a thorough search.

LADY K.

I'd offer to turn out my trunks, but I'm so horribly ashamed of my wardrobe, I'm afraid might be suspected.

LORD C.

I shall send for a detective—

LADY C.

No—certainly not.

LORD C.

But what is to be done?

[*The luncheon gong sounds.*

BARGENY

Go in to lunch, I should say.

LADY C.

Yes, please all of you go in to lunch. Mrs. Engaine, just a word—

LORD C.
(*Bewildered*)

It's most unpleasant—but perhaps we'd better have lunch.

LADY K.

We can have the necklace in place of one of the dishes that were spoilt.

[*Exeunt* LADY K. *and* LORD C. *left.*

BARGENY
(*To* FANNY)

You were lamenting there hadn't been a good rousing scandal for months—

LADY C.

There must be no scandal, Miss Chirk, I'm sure you understand—

FANNY

Oh, certainly.

[*Exeunt* FANNY *and* BARGENY *left.*

LADY C.

I'm so sorry, but I'm sure you won't make a stir, or call in detectives?

MRS. E.

Oh, no! If it can't be found I shall let it pass over.

LADY C.

Thank you, dear, so much.

[*Going off left.*

MRS. E.

After all, I have other jewels—

[*Exit,* LADY CARNFORTH *following.*

—CURTAIN—

(*Two days have passed between Acts I and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE. *The same, after dinner on the evening of the following Tuesday. The terrace window right is closed and the curtains drawn over it. The window left is open and shows the moonlight outside on the landscape. Discover* MARSH *turning up light in conservatory..* LADY CARNFORTH *enters left in evening dress.*

LADY C.

YOU ordered the motors?

MARSH

Yes, my lady, for ten sharp.

LADY C.

They'll take nearly all the visitors. I'll stay behind and the small motor can come back for me. Mr. Toler has not returned?

MARSH

No, my lady. He's in the village making inquiries.

LADY C.

Let me know when he comes back.

MARSH

I beg pardon, my lady, I hope none of the servants are suspected of taking Mrs. Engaine's necklace?

LADY C.

You are not suspected, Marsh. (STACKPOOL *enters left in evening dress*) Will you ask all the servants to please hold their tongues about the matter—if that is possible.

MARSH

Yes, my lady.

[*Exit left.*

STACK.

Any further news of the missing necklace?

LADY C.

None. I'm waiting to see the man Toller.

STACK.

Mrs. Engaine doesn't seem to trouble very much about it.

LADY C.

No. She has behaved very well. It would all have passed over, if Carnforth hadn't stupidly insisted on having a detective down.

STACK.

Ah! Husbands will do these stupid things. It's their métier. You aren't worrying about it?

LADY C.

Yes, I'm very much annoyed—

STACK.

(*Very winningly*)

Give me three dances to-night, and you'll find the annoyance has all gone!

LADY C.

I'm not sure I shall get to the dance. I must stay and get this man Toller back to London.

STACK.

Shall I wait and help you get rid of him?

LADY C.

No, thank you. Please don't take any notice of me —at any rate till this bother is over.

STACK.

Agreed. And when this bother is over—?

LADY C.

I'll try not to get into another—with you.

STACK.

Oh, you'll have endless bother with me until you recognise that I'm determined to—(*approaching her tenderly*)

LADY C.

(*As the door left opens*)

Hush!

[LORD CARNFORTH *enters left.*

LORD C.

The clouds are passing away; we shall have it fine to motor over.

STACK.

Lady Carnforth, I'll wait and come over with you—

LADY C.

No, please. Do go and get ready.

STACK.

You'll be over in time to give me a dance. (*Kisses his hand to her behind* LORD CARNFORTH'S *back.*)

[*Exit left*

LORD C.

Toller hasn't got back?

LADY C.

No, he's still in the village making inquiries, and setting everybody talking. Why couldn't you leave it alone?

LORD C.

Leave it alone? A valuable necklace is stolen—Everybody is under suspicion—all the servants, even our guests.

LADY C.

Suppose one of our guests took it?

LORD C.

I should say it is not impossible that one of *your* guests has taken it. In that case—

LADY C.

In that case the best thing to do is to say nothing and let it blow over.

LORD C.

You think so? Our ideas differ.

LADY C.

They do, on so many subjects—pearl necklaces, marriage, soups, sauces—in fact, is there any subject we agree upon?

LORD C.

(*Severely*)

You will oblige me by not classing marriage with soups or sauces.

[*Enter* MARSH *left.*

MARSH

Mr. Toller is in the library, my lord.

LORD C.

I'll see him there.

MARSH

Yes, my lord.

LADY C.

I'd better come too. (*Catches sight of* FULKS BISSETT *who appears outside the window left: he cautiously looks in, then withdraws.*) No—I'll see Toller when his lordship has finished with him.

MARSH

Yes, my lady.

[LORD CARNFORTH *has gone off left.* MARSH *follows him and closes door.* BISSETT *reappears at window.* LADY C. *goes up towards him.* BISSETT *enters—he is in tweed travelling suit. She looks at him, questioning and alarmed.*

BISSETT

Well, I've got back. How goes it? (*Comes up to her and kisses her*) You don't seem pleased to see me.

LADY C.

Why did you come that way?

BISSETT

No conveyance at the station as usual—so I left my portmanteau and walked up. Lovely night! (*She stands looking at him*) Is anything the matter?

LADY C.

Yes. You got my letter?

BISSETT

No. What letter?

LADY C.

I wrote you on Sunday to the Club.

BISSETT

Closed for cleaning. So I went to the Berkeley. Anything important?

LADY C.

Yes. Just after you left, Mrs. Engaine found that her pearl necklace was missing.

BISSETT

Did she though? Has she found it?

LADY C.

Fulks, don't pass it off like that. You know you may trust me.

BISSETT

Trust you? What about? Good Heavens, you don't think I know anything about it! So that's your opinion of me!

LADY C.

I should like to think I'm mistaken.

BISSETT

(*Irritated*)

Of course you're mistaken! What's going on here? I'm in time to take Violet to the dance?

LADY C.

Yes, she's expecting you. Fulks, I've been worrying terribly—

BISSETT

I shouldn't do that! Look at me! I'm not worrying—(*going left*) I must get upstairs and dress—

LADY C.

(*Stopping him*)

Fulks, Carnforth has got a private detective down—(BISSETT'S *face shows fright—she notices it.*)

BISSETT

Oh. What's he found out?

LADY C.

Nothing—at present.

BISSETT

Whom does he suspect?

LADY C.

Nobody—at present. I've done everything I can to hush it up and prevent any suspicion.

BISSETT

(*Recovering himself*)

Well, you needn't be afraid he's going to find out anything about me, for the simple reason there's nothing to find out.

LADY C.

Did you get the money?

BISSETT

Money?

LADY C.

The money you were bound to get for the man Bernstein.

BISSETT

I've squared him for the time.

LADY C.

How?

BISSETT

Never mind how. I can keep him quiet for a week or two.

LADY C.

Where did you get the money?

BISSETT

Look here, old girl, don't you worry about me. All you've got to do is to help me marry Violet straight off. I'm going to ask her to bolt with me to-night, unless Mrs. Engaine can be brought round. I suppose there's no chance of that?

LADY C.

I don't know. Fulks, I've heard something about her.

BISSETT

About Mrs. Engaine? What?

LADY C.

I can't tell you. I think I can make her consent.

BISSETT

To my marrying Violet? Good business! That sets me up for life. But there's no time to be lost—

LADY C.

I'll speak to her to-night.

BISSETT

Righto! Where is everybody?

LADY C.

They're getting ready to go to the dance—

[*Enter* MARSH *showing in* MR. TOLLER, *a private inquiry agent. He is about fifty, stout, bland, cleanshaven with middle-class dress and manners.*

MARSH

Mr. Toller.

LADY C.

I wished to see Mr. Toller in the library—

MARSH

I beg pardon, my lady. The ladies and gentlemen are in the library.

LADY C.

Very well.

[*Exit* MARSH.

[TOLLER *has stood in the way of* BISSETT'S *exit and has been regarding him unobtrusively from the corners of his eyes.* BISSETT *has waited to take stock of* TOLLER.

BISSETT

Well I must dress. (*To* LADY C.) Is this the—?

LADY C.

Mr. Toller is making inquiries about the missing necklace. (*To* TOLLER) My brother, Mr. Fulks Bissett.

TOLLER

How do, sir? Just back from London?

BISSETT

Yes. Hope you'll be successful, and get to the bottom of this.

TOLLER

I trust so, sir.

[*Exit* BISSETT.

TOLLER

(*Closing door after* BISSETT)

I trust so.

LADY C.

(*Sits*)

Have you discovered anything fresh?

TOLLER

No, my lady. But I'm narrowing it down.

LADY C.

How?

TOLLER

There's no doubt the necklace was taken by somebody living in the house.

LADY C.

How do you know that? Nearly everybody was at church—the doors and windows were open—it was just the chance for a clever burglar.

TOLLER

(*Shakes his head*)

He wouldn't have been content with the necklace. He'd have bagged the lot.

LADY C.

It may have been mislaid.

TOLLER

(*Shakes his head*)

I've made a thorough search with Mrs. Engaine's maid. She and Mrs. Engaine are positive it was in the jewel box all right. Mrs. Engaine remembers leaving her keys on her dressing table when she went to church. She was late in starting, and all the rest of the ladies and gentlemen had gone on. Consequently the onus rests upon the servants who didn't go to church, and upon the parties, servants or otherwise, who came back from church and had a chance of sneaking into Mrs. Engaine's room, before the maid discovered the necklace was gone. You follow me, my lady?

LADY C.

Yes. Do you suspect anybody?

TOLLER

I've narrowed it down to the under housemaid, the housekeeper, Marsh, Mrs. Chinnery, Mr. Stackpool, Sir Ralph Newell Mr. Bissett—

LADY C.

But it's quite absurd to suspect people like Sir Ralph and my brother.

TOLLER

I'm telling you where the onus lies, my lady.

LADY C.

There are all the other servants, and all the other visitors.

TOLLER

Yes, my lady. But none of the other servants or visitors had any chance of being alone in that wing of the house during church, or before the theft was discovered. Marsh and the housekeeper are old servants. They're well off, and they couldn't get rid of a valuable necklace without a lot of trouble. I don't place it there, my lady.

LADY C.

There's the housemaid—

TOLLER

(*Shakes his head*)

Lives down here all the year—is engaged to one of the gardeners—hasn't any chance of disposing of it. No, we must look in another quarter, my lady.

LADY C.

What do you mean?

TOLLER

We're left with Mrs. Chinnery, Mr. Stackpool, Sir Ralph and Mr. Bissett on our hands—

LADY C.

Impossible! Sir Ralph! My brother! It's absurd! You fix upon my guests and you pass over the most likely culprit.

TOLLER

Who might that be, my lady?

LADY C.

The maid Bickmore. She had every chance of taking it.

TOLLER

She had. But then she wouldn't have discovered the theft ten minutes after.

LADY C.

That might be her cunning.

TOLLER

It might. But she wouldn't have taken it down here

where she can't get rid of it. She'd have waited till she got back to London. There's another point, my lady—

LADY C.

What's that?

TOLLER

Whoever has taken the necklace, it must be still on the premises—(*watching her*).

LADY C.

Why?

TOLLER

Nobody has left the house since it was stolen—

LADY C.

That's true!

TOLLER

(*Significantly*)

Except Mr. Bissett.

LADY C.

Oh, my brother is quite out of the question.

TOLLER

Mr. Stackpool's room is quite away in another part of the house. So is Sir Ralph's. So is Mrs. Chinnery's. Mr. Bissett's room is just opposite to Mrs. Engaine's.

LADY C.

(*Rising*)

Mr Toller, I refuse to listen to these unwarrantable suspicions against my guests. I consider them an insult.

TOLLER

(*Has been looking at her back; comes up to her cunningly*)

Perhaps, my lady, you'd prefer me to drop the matter altogether.

LADY C.

(*Looking at him*)

I think that would be best.

TOLLER

Very well, my lady.

LADY C.

You will allow me to pay you handsomely for your trouble.

TOLLER

Certainly, my lady.

LADY C.

Then you will tell Lord Carnforth that it is useless to pursue the inquiries, and you will go back to London?

TOLLER

By the first train in the morning, my lady.

LADY C.

If you'll send me your account I'll send you a cheque.

TOLLER

Thank you. (*Very cunningly.*) We shan't disagree about terms, my lady?

LADY C.

(*Looks at him with meaning*)

Not if you carry out my instructions.

TOLLER

Right, my lady.

[*Enter left* LADY K. *in evening dress, followed by* BARGENY.

BARGENY

Well, how's the necklace hunt? Any scent?

LADY K.

Has any damning piece of evidence turned up against me?

LADY C.

Mr. Toller thinks the necklace is mislaid somewhere about the house.

LADY K.

I'm sure it is. I wonder who has mislaid it? And where?

LADY C.

He says it will most likely turn up. (*Glancing at* TOLLER).

TOLLER

Quite likely, my lady.

LADY C.

Meantime he doesn't propose to make any further inquiries for the present.

BARGENY

(*Disappointed*)

You aren't going to throw it up, Toller, just as it's getting interesting?

TOLLER

(*Embarrassed*)

Well—a—(*Glances slyly at* LADY C.)

LADY K.

Much better leave it where it is, Top. We can still go on suspecting each other.

TOLLER

Oh, I assure your ladyship, there isn't the least suspicion attaching to your ladyship.

LADY K.

Thank you, Mr. Toller. You have a much higher opinion of me than most of my friends.

LADY C.

We must accept Mr. Toller's advice and leave it. You've had great experience, Mr. Toller?

TOLLER

Enormous, my lady. Our firm stands at the head of the profession. We touch nothing except the most select business—high class divorce cases, society scandals, and so on. I've had some of the best families in England through my hands, and they've come out, as you may say, without a stain on their character.

LADY K.

I shall entrust you with my next divorce suit.

TOLLER

Oh, my lady, I hope that won't be necessary.

LADY K.

Well, I'm sixty-nine, but one never knows.

LADY C.

(*To* TOLLER)

I'll take you to his Lordship. (*Going to door left.*) Come this way.

[*Exit left.*

TOLLER

(*Turns to* LADY K. *and* BAR.)

If at any time you should have any business that needs secrecy and discretion—

BARGENY

You don't seem to be making a very clever job of this, Toller.

TOLLER

Well, sir, there are times when it don't do to know too much. (*Going*).

LADY C.

(*Outside door left*)

Mr. Toller!

[*Exit* TOLLER *left very quickly.*

LADY K.

Elinor has got him to hush it up.

BARGENY

That looks a little like Mr. Fulks, don't it? Who's your fancy?

LADY K.

It can't be you and it can't be me, because we didn't get a chance.

BARGENY

Fanny seems to be very much interested.

LADY K.

She has got to put her nose into every society mess, for business purposes.

BARGENY

What was she doing on Sunday after church?

LADY K.

Listening while I raked up all the mid-Victorian scandals that had better be left alone.

BARGENY

Talking about scandals, I've got a very pretty history of a very pretty lady tucked up my sleeve.

LADY K.

Tell it to me—so far as it doesn't incriminate yourself.

BARGENY

Oh, I'm not concerned, but I fancy the necklace business aint the only treat we're going to have.

LADY K.

It won't be if you've got hold of anything. Who's your victim?

BARGENY

I mustn't say till I'm sure.

[*Enter* FANNY *left in evening dress.*

FANNY

Isn't it maddening about this necklace? Dear Lady K, dear Mr. Bargeny, do tell me whom you suspect.

LADY K.

I've suspected everybody, so I can't be wrong.

FANNY

Between ourselves, I rather fancy—No, I'd better not say.

BARGENY

If you've spotted the winner, tell us who it is, so that we can put our money on.

FANNY

Isn't there one person—in particular—a certain lady who is always hard up?

LADY K.

That points at me.

FANNY

A lady who keeps an expensive flat, and always has everything of the very best, without any visible means of paying for it.

LADY K.

There are so many of them. Who can it be?

BARGENY

Mrs. Fred Chinnery!

LADY K.

Well, she cheats at cards and on Sunday at church she put a button in the collection bag.

FANNY

Don't you remember she said if she saw Mrs. Engaine's jewellery again, she was sure she should grab it.

BARGENY

By Jove, yes!

FANNY

I wouldn't for thousands of worlds let her know I suspect her, because she's one of my oldest friends. And one must keep on good terms.

BARGENY

Mrs. Fred is well in the running. All the same I stick to my first fancy—

FANNY

Who's that?

BARGENY

A certain young gentleman who has a very shady reputation, and is head over heels in debt—

FANNY

Fulks Bissett!

BARGENY

His bedroom is just opposite to Mrs. Engaine's where the necklace was—

FANNY

Yes—it's the only one near Mrs. Engaine's. Mrs.

Chinnery is in the other wing, so is Sir Ralph—so is Mr. Stackpool—

LADY K.

Oh, Harry Stackpool never knows where his bedroom is. He's always making mistakes.

FANNY

But still—Fulke Bissett? If he's going to marry Miss Engaine, he wouldn't need it. And he'd never ruin his chances. Besides, I don't think it's quite a man's trick. Men don't go about stealing necklaces.

LADY K.

I've known several who don't.

FANNY

It's so much more like a woman.

BARGENY

It is. But even then it's puzzling.

LADY K.

Yes, and we're wasting our time over mere kleptomania, when we might be enjoying a rich, full-blooded scandal.

FANNY

(*All alive with curiosity*)

What do you mean?

LADY K.

Ask Mr. Bargeny.

FANNY

Mr. Bargeny, do you know anything about—? Have you—? Who is it? Do tell me!

BARGENY

My lips are closed.

FANNY

I'm sure they aren't. I'm sure you know all sorts of wicked secrets about everybody here. Who is it?

BARGENY

My dear Miss Chirk, if I knew anything that would damage a woman's reputation—

FANNY

Then it's a woman! And it would damage her reputation! Do tell me.

BARGENY

Not wild horses nor wild society journalists shall drag it from me.

FANNY

I won't make use of it. Honour! Do tell me! (*Coming to* LADY K) Dear Lady K., have pity and tell me!

LADY K.

I don't know, but as Mr. Bargeny can't tell *me,* it must be something indescribably shocking.

FANNY

Mrs. Chinnery's going to make a flare-up about Lady Carnforth and Mr. Stackpool!

LADY K.

Is she? On what grounds?

FANNY

Well anyone can see—

BARGENY

Except Carnforth.

LADY K.

Lord Carnforth is the type of man that Providence turns out expressly for his wife to make a fool of.

FANNY

But is it Lady Carnforth? Do tell me! Oh, it's too provoking! It's Mrs. Engaine? Is it Mrs. Engaine?

[MRS. CHINNERY *enters left in evening dress.* STACKPOOL *follows her.*

FANNY

Who is it?

BARGENY

Let's finish with the necklace first—

MRS. C.

Oh, for Heaven's sake, do let us finish with the neck-

lace. (*Glances at* BARGENY *indicating suspicion of her.*)

STACK.

By the way, has anybody taken the trouble to clear me of suspicion?

LADY K.

Yes, Harry, I have. I said you couldn't possibly have time to break the *eighth* commandment—you were so busy next door.

[SIR RALPH *enters left in evening dress.*

MRS. C.

I think it's terrible that a bit of jewellery can't be lost without all of us whispering the most horrid suspicions of each other.

BARGENY

Yes, but somebody has got it. And it's very uncomfortable to be in the house with that sort of people, eh, Ralph?

SIR R.

Oh, I've been rubbing shoulders with all sorts of rum devils for the last ten years.

LADY K.

As a training for your return to us.

SIR R.

I can't say I was quite prepared—

STACK.

Oh, we have the defects of our qualities. A country's a hole that hasn't a leisured class, and once you get a leisured class, most of 'em set about finding out what mischief they can be up to.

SIR R.

Work's the only thing that keeps people out of mischief.

STACK.

Thank you. I prefer mischief. I don't mean to do a day's work till I'm obliged.

[*Enter* FULKS *left in very correct evening dress, with flower in his buttonhole, and apparently in high spirits.*

FULKS

How do, everybody? Mrs. Chinnery. (*Nods to her*)

MRS. C.

How d'ye do?

FULKS

Miss Chirk! Any more scandals? Hillo, Ralph!

SIR R.

How are you?

FULKS

Ripping! Just had a hot bath, and a rub down, and a pint of champagne, and now I'm ready for a jolly evening! Hillo old Viking, how goes it? (*Putting his hand affectionately on* BARGENY'S *shoulder*)

BARGENY

Just back from London?

FULKS

Haven't been in London. Only rushed through on Sunday and rushed through on my way back to-night. Billy Canniper has got a horse that's going to pull off the Leger—Loosestrife—I've been staying with Billy at his stables since Sunday, and I've put my uttermost farthing on Loosestrife. I advise you all to do the same. Forty to one! Loosestrife!

[*Enter left* MRS. ENGAINE *in evening dress and cloak, she is speaking to* VIOLET *who enters immediately after her in evening dress and cloak on arm, and with a button hole in her hand.*

MRS. E.

(*Turning at door to speak to* VIO. *in a low voice*) No, Violet, no!

VIO.

(*To her*)

Yes, I shall!

MRS. E.

(*Trying to restrain her, in a low grieved voice*)

Violet!

VIO.

(*Gets away from her, goes up to* BISSETT *with button hole*)

How d'ye do? (*Shaking hands*)

BISSETT

How d'ye do?

VIO.

Oh, you have a buttonhole. I was going to offer you this.

BISSETT

Oh, I'll soon wring his neck! (*Takes his own buttonhole out and flings it away*) There! If you'll repeat your offer—

[VIOLET *gives him the flower, he tries to place it in his buttonhole with studied clumsiness.*

BISSETT

(*To* MRS. ENGAINE *who has stood watching, evidently much wounded*)

Hope you don't mind my taking it, Mrs. Engaine. Wouldn't have been quite the right thing to refuse it, would it?

MRS. E.

Violet is a little too hasty and too generous sometimes. I hope she won't regret it.

BISSETT

(*Has been pretending to fix the buttonhole*)

What a clumsy beggar I am! Would you mind fixing for me, then I shall be sure it's to your liking?

[VIOLET *straightens the flower in his buttonhole, while all of them are watching,*

MRS. ENGAINE *with evident pain and disapproval.*

VIO.

(*Having fastened it*)

There! Will that do?

BISSETT

Fits me like a glove. I'm going to be cheeky and ask for a dance.

VIO.

I haven't promised any.

BISSETT

Then I'll book as many as you can spare.

[LADY CARNFORTH *enters left followed by* LORD CARNFORTH, *who is in evident displeasure.*

LORD C.

Most unsatisfactory! It can't be left as it is.

LADY C.

It must, if nothing can be discovered.

LORD C.

(*To* MRS. ENGAINE)

Mr. Toller says he hasn't been able to discover anything. Would you wish me to take any further steps?

MRS. E.

No, dear Lord Carnforth. Pray let us forget all about it.

[MARSH *enters left.*

MARSH

The motors are waiting, your ladyship.

LADY C.

Now, if you're all ready—

(*There is a little movement of the guests towards door left when* BICKMORE *enters at it with a handsome pearl necklace in her hand. They all show a startled interest.* BISSETT *watches very quietly and unobtrusively.*

BICK

(*Excitedly*)

I beg pardon, ma'am, I've found the necklace. (*Displaying necklace, going towards* MRS. *E.*

MRS. E.

(*Takes it, examines it*)

Yes! Where was it?

BICK

I went into your room just now to tidy up, and the moment I turned up the light, there it was lying on the floor.

MRS. E.

Lying on the floor! (*Little ejaculations of surprise and interest from all the guests and little looks exchanged.*)

BICK

Yes, ma'am. Somebody must have thrown it in at the door between the time you went downstairs and the time I went up to tidy. And I hope it will be thoroughly inquired into.

MRS. E.

That will do, Bickmore. I think I'll wear it tonight. (*Fastening it round her neck.*)

BICK

I beg pardon, ma'am, but I hope for the sake of the honest people who have been unjustly suspected—

MRS. E.

That will do, Bickmore.

BICK

Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit left.*

LADY C.

Bickmore seems very anxious to proclaim her honesty.

MRS. E.

I don't think you should say that. I have every confidence in Bickmore. Please let us say no more about it.

LADY C.

Yes, I'm sure that will be best. Now you'll be very late for the dance. See that all is ready, Marsh.

MARSH

Yes, my lady.

[*Exit left.*

LADY C.

The large motor will take six. Lady K., Mr. Bargeny,—Miss Chirk, Mr. Stackpool,—Fulks, Violet, my dear—

MRS. E.

(*Looking at Fulks and Violet*)

May I go in the first motor?

LADY C.

If you don't mind coming on with me later. I wish to have a few minutes with you.

MRS. E.

I'd rather—

(*Glancing at Fulks and Violet*)

LADY C.

It's rather important.

MRS. E.

Very well.

[*Exeunt* LADY K. *and* BARGENY.

LADY C.

Miss Chirk, Mr. Stackpool.

MRS. C.

(*Discontented*)

Do I go in the second party?

LADY C.

Will you be so kind?

MRS. C.

Oh, certainly. (*Watching* STACKPOOL *and* MISS CHIRK *jealously.*)

FANNY

(*To* STACK. *as they go off*)

Now mind, you're not to flirt with me in the motor.

STACK.

Then will you please make some other appointment?

[*Exeunt* FANNY *and* STACKPOOL *left.*

(MRS. CHINNERY *has listened jealously and follows them off*)

BISSETT

(*To* MRS. E., *going off with* VIOLET)

I hope you won't be anxious, Mrs. Engaine. I'll take great care of Violet.

MRS. E.

I hope Violet will remember to take care of herself.

VIO.

Oh, yes, Duckie! I'm quite capable of it, I assure you!

[*Goes off with* BISSETT *left.*

LADY C.

(*To* LORD C.)

Carnforth, will you and Ralph take Mrs. Chinnery in the small motor?

LORD C.

Certainly, I should like this affair cleared up.

LADY C.

(*Frowns at him*)

Please leave it in my hands. (*Exit* LORD C. *left.*) Rafe, the motor is ready.

[*Exit left.*

SIR R.

I must speak to you to-night.

MRS. E.

Ah, no. It will be useless.

SIR R.

I must. We shan't get a chance of being alone at the dance. I'll make some excuse to come back. Will you wait for me here?

MRS. E.

Yes.

SIR R.

I'll be back as soon as I can. [*Exit left.*

[*She rises; her features show alternate delight and apprehension; she makes a gesture indicating helplessness in face of a coming struggle; goes up to window.* TOLLER *appears at the lower conservatory entrance, cautiously looking round. He enters a step or two into the room.*

TOLLER

(*In a whisper*)

Mrs. Engaine!

(*She turns round*)

TOLLER

Can I have a word with you, ma'am?

MRS. E.

The necklace is found, (*indicating the necklace on her neck*) so you needn't trouble any further.

TOLLER

Would you allow me to look at it for a moment?

MRS. E.

What for?

TOLLER

To use a vulgar expression, ma'am, you're being done in the eye. But I can't prove it unless you trust me and keep what passes between us strictly private. Might I look at the necklace? (*Glancing round stealthily to make sure they are not observed.* MRS. ENGAINE *with some reluctance and distrust begins to take off the necklace.*) As quick as you can, please, ma'am. We haven't got a moment. (*She gives him the necklace. He examines it.*) Your necklace has been missing since Sunday. They keep bushels of imitation pearls in stock—

MRS. E.

You mean that isn't my necklace?

TOLLER

Rather a new fastening, isn't it, ma'am?

MRS. E.

I had a new one made a few weeks ago.

TOLLER

Will you let me have this tested?

MRS. E.

I'd rather not. Please give it to me.

TOLLER

(*Giving it back. She fastens it round her neck again*)

I advise you to have those pearls tested. I shall be back in London to-morrow. I know where to go, and I shall soon find out if the trick has been done, and who has done it. When I get the information, shall I bring it to you?

MRS. E.

(*Hesitating*)

I don't wish to make any disturbance.

TOLLER

You can do as you like about that, ma'am. But it might be useful to you to know whether you're being done, and also who's doing you.

MRS. E.

(*After a moment's hesitation*)

Very well. Let me know.

TOLLER

All right, ma'am. Strictly between ourselves—

[MRS. E. *gives a little nod of assent, as* LADY CARNFORTH *enters left.*

LADY C.

(*To* TOLLER)

Oh Mr. Toller, I've been looking for you—

TOLLER

Well, my lady, I'd finished the excellent supper

Marsh gave me, so I just stepped in here to congratulate Mrs. Engaine—

LADY C.

Yes. Your duties are over, aren't they?

TOLLER

Yes, my lady.

LADY C.

Please send your account to *me*. Good-night.

TOLLER

Good-night, my lady. That pâté-de-fois gras was excellent, my lady. (LADY C. *turns her back on him and takes no notice of him.*) Quite excellent.

[*Exit* TOLLER *left.*

LADY C.

Dreadful person! I'm glad we're rid of him! Now, dear, if you can give me ten minutes.

MRS. E.

Yes?

[LADY C. *looks all round; having assured herself that they are alone, seats herself at writing table.* MRS. ENGAINE *has watched her looking round and has shown a furtive interest.*

LADY C.

Do sit down. (MRS. E. *seats herself.*) It's rather disagreeable, but I'd better be perfectly frank—

MRS. E.

If you please.

LADY C.

I've had a communication from a friend who fancies he met you—

MRS. E.

Indeed—when?

LADY C.

About ten years ago. He thinks he recognizes you

as the notorious Nora Shard—(*Still watching* Mrs. E. *very keenly.*)

Mrs. E.

Nora Shard?

Lady C.

The girl who ruined poor Harold Furnival—you must surely remember—

Mrs. E.

Yes—I remember.

Lady C.

I said it was absurd to identify you with Nora Shard. But I thought I ought to tell you—so that we can contradict the story at once.

Mrs. E.

Thank you.

Lady C.

(*Turning round to writing table and taking up pen and paper*)

Now, dear, tell me what you wish to say, so that we can deny it in your own words.

Mrs. E.

Who has been so obliging as to start this story about me? Is it Mr. Bargeny?

Lady C.

I mustn't say. The chief thing is to contradict it emphatically before it gets repeated. Now, dear, what shall I say?

Mrs. E.

But you have already told your friend it was absurd.

Lady C.

Yes.

Mrs. E.

Isn't that sufficient?

Lady C.

I'm afraid not. Being your friend and your hostess I took up the cudgels for you. But I may tell you

privately it can't be allowed to rest. (*Pause, looking at her.*) What do you propose to do?

MRS. E.

Take no notice of it.

LADY C.

That's impossible. What am I to say?

MRS. E.

Simply that I am Mrs. Engaine, and your guest.

LADY C.

That won't prove you aren't Nora Shard, will it?

MRS. E.

Then it will be better for Violet and me to leave Quarnby?

LADY C.

That would be most imprudent. It would be the same as owning you are this woman. You wouldn't like Rafe to think you are this creature who ruined his friend, and killed him?

MRS. E.

Has Sir Ralph heard this story?

LADY C.

No. He has heard nothing and suspects nothing. Now, dear, (*again turns to pen and paper*) shall I say you emphatically deny it? (*Turns round to her—pause.*) Don't you deny it? (*Looks at her, rises, comes to her.*) Don't you deny it? (*Pause.*) You can't! You are Nora Shard!

MRS. E.

(*Quietly*)

Yes, I am. I have never denied it, and I never shall.

LADY C.

Perhaps you've never had occasion to deny it. You disappeared, you know. That was undoubtedly the best thing to do. Do you intend to disappear again?

MRS. E.

No, I shall stay and face it.

LADY C.

You'll find that very unpleasant—in fact, my dear, you simply can't do it. Everybody will cut you, you'll have an awful three months, and then you'll have to disappear again. No, you'd better put yourself entirely in my hands.

MRS. E.

What would you do?

LADY C.

I'll stand by you and help you out of it.

MRS. E.

How?

LADY C.

I can hush it up for the time. Meantime, we must get Violet married to Fulks—

MRS. E.

I don't see my way to that.

LADY C.

My dear, you must. That gives you a standing here. Then you must accept Ralph. He's only waiting for you to give him a chance to propose. That will give you another standing here. We can hurry matters, and have the two weddings together here at Quarnby next month—there's no reason we shouldn't.

MRS. E.

I think there are many reasons we shouldn't.

LADY C.

What reasons?

MRS. E.

You advise me to marry Sir Ralph without telling him who I am?

LADY C.

Why not? Ralph's a dear, good, straight fellow,

and you may be sure that when once you're his wife, he'll stand by you, whatever happens.

MRS. E.

Yes, I know he will. That seems to me a reason for not deceiving him.

LADY C.

My dear, in your position you can't afford to have scruples. Surely when you're married to him you're clever enough to bring him round.

MRS. E.

Yes, I daresay I'm clever enough for that.

LADY C.

Very well then—why do you hesitate?

MRS. E.

I don't think I can bring myself round.

LADY C.

To what?

MRS. E.

To marry him under false pretences, and then to be always afraid that he may learn the truth.

LADY C.

Oh, that will soon pass over. You'll be staying with us here and in town. I shall take care to let it be understood that you are my friend, and that you'll have to be known to anyone who wishes to know me.

MRS. E.

Then you think I am a person who can be known?

LADY C.

Certainly, under those circumstances.

MRS. E.

And you don't mind?

LADY C.

Mind what?

MRS. E.

You are a leader of society, and you mix only with

what you call the best people. Naturally you're very careful in your choice of friends, aren't you?

LADY C.

Yes, I hope.

MRS. E.

And I am to be your friend?

LADY C.

Haven't I just said so!

MRS. E.

I'm very glad my character will have nothing to do with our friendship.

LADY C.

I don't understand you.

MRS. E.

You know I am a "creature" who has ruined a man and caused his death. Do you really think I shall be a desirable friend?

LADY C.

Oh, there will be no need to take any notice of that if you do as I propose.

MRS. E.

Suppose it all comes out?

LADY C.

Wtih me at your side, you can afford to ignore it. It might be prudent perhaps to go away with Ralph for a few months. You'll come back as Lady Newell and I shall be seen everywhere with you. It will soon be all forgotten. We have short memories for such things when we wish. Leave it all to me. I'll see you safely through.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

LADY C.

Then you fall in with my plan?

MRS. E.

I think not.

LADY C.

Do you really mean that?

MRS. E.

Yes.

LADY C.

Then, my dear Mrs. Engaine, you are going to have a very bad time indeed.

MRS. E.

In what way?

LADY C.

In the first place you will lose Ralph. That will scarcely be pleasant to you?

MRS. E.

I won't speak of that.

LADY C.

Well, you will lose him, certainly. And I'm afraid, it will get to be known that you have been obliged to leave Quarnby on account of a very disagreeable scandal—

MRS. E.

You're afraid that will be known?

LADY C.

I tell you frankly I shall do nothing to stop it. It will probably get into the Society papers—

MRS. E.

Yes, Miss Chirk is here.

LADY C.

You'll have to hide your head somewhere, it won't much matter where, but it certainly will be amongst very undesirable people.

MRS. E.

So different from those I have been meeting lately.

LADY C.

My dear, there is only one set of undesirable people, those whom nobody will know, however good and ex-

cellent they are. I shall certainly do my best to prevent Violet being dragged into that set.

MRS. E.

What have you to do with Violet?

LADY C.

She's engaged to my brother. She'll have to be presented. I shall see to that. Meantime everybody will say I am justified in taking care that my brother's wife is not left in the charge of—I don't wish to hurt your feelings—

MRS. E.

Oh, please don't mind. Say a "creature" who has ruined a man, etcetera. So you mean to poison Violet against me?

LADY C.

Oh, no. I shall merely tell her the facts. I suppose she doesn't know them?

MRS. E.

No.

LADY C.

Won't you find it difficult to keep her when she does? Especially as Fulks and she seem determined to get married at once?

MRS. E.

You intend to encourage them?

LADY C.

I certainly shan't hinder them—in fact, now this disastrous story has come to light I shall propose to Violet that it would be better for me to chaperon her from this time.

MRS. E.

I see.

LADY C.

Do you? I'm glad. Because you must realize that you'd better fall in with my plan.

MRS. E.

I think not.

LADY C.

You surely don't refuse?

MRS. E.

Yes—I refuse.

LADY C.

I really think you must be mad. (*Looking at watch*) It's late. Shall we be getting on to the dance?

MRS. E.

I'm not going.

LADY C.

I must be there.

MRS. E.

You would wish us to leave Quarnby to-morrow?

LADY C.

Oh dear, no. Stay as long as you like. In the end you'll accept my friendship.

MRS. E.

Not if it means that I have to sell Violet to your brother!

LADY C.

(*Flushes up with intense resentment, and is about to reply—checks herself*)

Please don't use such terms. I'm trying to help you out of a horrible difficulty. Don't make it impossible. Think it over carefully, and do be a sensible woman.

[*Exit left.*

[*Left alone,* MRS. ENGAINE *rings bell, walks about the room for a few seconds.* MARSH *appears at door left.*

MRS. E.

Will you please send Bickmore to me?

MARSH

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. E.

What is the first train to London?

MARSH

Six forty-five, ma'am. And a fast one at eight, ma'am.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

[*Exit* MARSH.

[MRS. E. *takes off the pearl necklace, stands under the light, examines it carefully, looks at the fastening, holds it up to the light and looks through the pearls. Enter* BICKMORE *left.*

BICK.

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. E.

Bickmore, I shall want you to get up early and go to London.

BICK.

Yes, ma'am.

[*Enter* SIR RALPH *left.*

MRS. E.

I'll tell you about it when I come upstairs. Leave it now, please.

BICK.

Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit left.*

MRS. E.

You're back from the dance?

SIR R.

Yes. I sneaked away as soon as I got there. I couldn't stay. I must know—

MRS. E.

What?

SIR R.

I can't understand your treatment of me.

MRS. E.

I haven't been unkind, have I?

SIR R.

Worse than unkind. You must see the state I'm in —the foolish helpless state of loving you so thoroughly that I can think of nothing else. Yet you keep on torturing me.

MRS. E.

Not willingly.

SIR R.

But you do torture me. I've shown you so plainly how deeply I love you. Even before I told you on Sunday, you must have known it. And I think you love me—I'm sure you do—(*Approaching her trying to take her hand*)

MRS. E.

(*Withdrawing from him*)

I have never said that—or shown it, have I?

SIR R.

Yes, in a hundred ways. And yet you have held me apart from you. When I've been going to speak you've stopped me and turned me aside. And since I did speak on Sunday, you've avoided me. What's the reason? You aren't a coquette—you aren't a silly girl who wants to show off her caprices before she lets herself be won by the man she loves. Why do you torture me? Won't you give me a word of hope, and let me feel sure I shall win you at last? As I shall— As I shall—Shan't I? (*Approaching her, she stands away from him and does not respond*) I think a few more days like these will send me mad! I love you! I worship you! What more do you want me to say? I'll say it! I've given you all my heart! Won't you take it?

MRS. E.

You're sure I have all your heart?

SIR R.

Every thought of it.

MRS. E.

You said on Sunday you were devoted to your friend Harold Furnival.

SIR R.

Ah, now, if it were any woman but you, I should say you were trifling with me. Yes, dear fellow, I was devoted to him! More at that time than I had ever been to a woman. What's that to do with you and me? Surely you aren't jealous of Harold Furnival?

MRS. E.

I'm a woman, and perhaps I have more of a woman's little piques and curiosities than you guess. If I were to ask you to put Harold Furnival quite out of your thoughts and feelings for the future, would you do it?

SIR R.

Yes of course. (*She shows great delight*) Poor old Harold! Why do you ask?

MRS. E.

Call it just a woman's whim. Will you promise me whatever happens, Harold Furnival shall never come between you and me?

SIR R.

Certainly I will. How could he? He was my friend, my chum, my brother, and I don't believe a man is capable of great love for a woman unless he is capable of great friendship for a man. But it's so utterly different. A thousand Harold Furnivals are nothing to me, compared with you. Besides, it's ten years ago—he has gone out of my life.

MRS. E.

Are you sure?

SIR R.

Yes! How strange you are! Why do you ask?

MRS. E.

Only to make sure that I have all your heart.

SIR R.

Well you have! Harold is only a memory. A very

dear cherished memory, but no more. Why don't you ask me about the women I have loved, or thought I loved? You've far more reason to be jealous of them.

MRS. E.

I won't be jealous of anybody, not even of Harold Furnival.

SIR R.

Then you love me and you'll be my wife! Ah, you don't know how happy you've made me! We'll be married as soon as ever I can persuade you to get ready. And I'll stay in England. I'll put up for the county—You shall help me make a career. I know you can! You're just the woman that makes a man believe in himself, and lifts him head and shoulders above the rest.

MRS. E.

(*Glowing with pride*)

Am I?

SIR R.

We'll do up the old place and have some big parties down there. What a splendid hostess you'll make—Evadne! (*Approaching her*)

MRS. E.

Stay! You haven't asked *me* any questions!

SIR R.

What questions?

MRS. E.

If I had loved another man?

SIR R.

I'm not going to ask you how much love you gave to him, or them. I'm only going to ask you how much love you've got to give *me?*" (*Holding out his arms*)

MRS. E.

(*Throwing herself into them*)

Oceans! Oceans! Oceans! All that my heart has to give!

SIR R.

(*Having kissed her fervently*)

That's the only question I shall ask you! And it's answered! Now shall we go to the dance? Where's your cloak?

MRS. E.

No. You must ask me one question.

SIR R.

What?

MRS. E.

Ask me who was the man I loved.

SIR R.

Who was he?

MRS. E.

Harold Furnival.

SIR R.

Nora Shard!

MRS. E.

Yes—that was my name.

SIR R.

Is it possible?

(*A long pause*)

MRS. E.

Why don't you speak to me?

SIR R.

You told me your name was Evadne.

MRS. E.

Nora Evadne Shard. Naturally I took my second name, not to deceive, but only to escape from notice and talk.

SIR R.

And you have escaped?

MRS. E.

Up till now. There was no reason I should pro-

claim who I was. But I had to tell you. I was right, wasn't I?

SIR R.

(*Absorbed, trying to realize the situation*)

Yes—Yes—

MRS. E.

Then why don't you tell me so? (*Agonized*) Speak to me! Speak to me!

SIR R.

What can I say?

MRS. E.

Tell me you don't think badly of me, not so badly that you can't love me. Speak to me!

SIR R.

I can't. I want to think this over—

MRS. E.

No. Question me! Let me explain!

SIR R.

Won't that be painful?

MRS. E.

It has to be done! I want you to know everything. You must know, so that there may be perfect trust between us in the future. Don't you wish for that?

SIR R.

Tell me everything. When did you first meet him?

MRS. E.

When I was sixteen. I was just like any other girl, not very clever or educated. He came down to contest Mapleham and was a good deal at our house. He took a lot of notice of me and naturally I felt very proud of it. He began to consult me about the election business. In that way a secret understanding grew up between us.

SIR R.

You loved him?

MRS. E.

What does a girl know of love? Yes, I loved him

as a girl loves the hero of her favourite novel—not as I love you. You may be sure of that. Aren't you sure of it?

SIR R.

Go on. Tell me all now.

MRS. E.

We kept it quite secret; not a soul guessed it, not even my own father and mother. He wanted to tell you—

SIR R.

He spoke to you about me?

MRS. E.

Constantly. When I met you in New York I felt I knew you quite well. He would have told you, but I begged him not.

SIR R.

How long did it last?

MRS. E.

Three years. It was triumph on triumph for him, one continued fever of success—

SIR R.

And for you?

MRS. E.

It all passed like one happy day, no longer. I just lived and loved—that was all. But he couldn't bear it.

SIR R.

Couldn't bear what?

MRS. E.

He had terrible times of remorse and self contempt.

SIR R.

And you?

MRS. E.

I loved him and gloried in it. You wish me to tell you the whole truth?

SIR R.

Yes, it will be best.

MRS. E.

Then came your going away. He said "Good-bye" to you and came down to me. He was terribly upset about losing you. He felt he could stand it no longer. He wanted to give up his career and leave everything for me. But I wouldn't let him. He went back to town to make a great speech. Oh, I remember it so well! When you spoke of it on Sunday, it all came back. The next day I got a letter from him. You had persuaded him to throw me over.

SIR R.

Yes—

MRS. E.

Everything was gone. I fell ill, very ill, and at last I crawled up to town to see him. He was ill too—he welcomed me as he had never welcomed me. There was no going back anymore. The "baggage" had got hold of him again!

SIR R.

Baggage?!

MRS. E.

It was what you called me on Sunday morning.

SIR R.

How could I know it was you?

MRS. E.

Well, baggage or no, I got hold of him again. And this time for good. He insisted on giving up everything for me. Then we were perfectly happy.

SIR R.

Happy!

MRS. E.

There had always been a canker in it for him because of the deceit, and there had always been a canker in it for me because he could never own me for the woman he loved and make me his wife. But the moment we were quite open about it, we felt our love was enough and would make up for it all. He sent in his

resignation, put his affairs straight, and the next day we left for Folkstone on our way abroad. That was Saturday. On the Monday he was killed at my side.

(*A very long pause*)

MRS. E.

Well? (SIR R. *does not speak*). Well? It's a pretty bad story, isn't it? But we were ready to pay the price.

SIR R.

Price?

MRS. E.

The price of loving each other. When a man and a woman are ready to give up everything, and face shame and contempt and scandal—well, their love may be bad and wrong and immoral, as I daresay ours was, but there's something in it worth having—there's a diamond in it—it may be in the dirt, but it's a diamond. And we were ready to pay the price for it. He did pay the price. He gave up his splendid career and was killed. He was luckier than I— (*Shudders*)

SIR R.

It must have been terrible for you.

MRS. E.

Don't speak of it! The inquest, the horrible publicity, the placards, the getting way to America, the being recognized on the boat! It was hideous martyrdom. But I paid the price and lived through it.

SIR R.

And then? Tell me all.

MRS. E.

As soon as I could pull round I took to nursing. I met Mr. Engaine. He was kind and sympathetic and very rich. He became attached to me and wanted me to marry him. For a long while I refused. But there was Violet. She was the only thing near me and I'd got to love her dearly. He saw that, and he felt he

could leave her more safely in my care if I became his wife. I thought my life was over. He was an invalid and hadn't long to live—it couldn't be a real marriage. So I accepted him. I nursed him a few years till he died. That was rather more than a year ago. Then I brought Violet over to England. You know the rest. I met you. I began to live again for the first time in ten years. I found my heart wasn't dead (*pause*) Well? Speak to me (*imploringly*)

SIR R.

Does anyone in England know you are Nora Shard?

MRS. E.

Yes, Lady Carnforth. And I think Mr. Bargeny.

SIR R.

They won't make it public?

MRS. E.

I'm afraid they will; unless I give my consent to Violet's engagement. Then Lady Carnforth says she'll help me hush it up. But I mustn't do that—must I? I mustn't sell Violet to Fulks Bissett.

SIR R.

No—no—I think not—

MRS. E.

I don't think I much mind it coming out again for my own sake—I paid the price once—I can pay it again, if only you—you—Tell me what I am to do?

SIR R.

Good God! I don't know—this has come so suddenly. I can't see round it.

MRS. E.

What do you think of me?

SIR R.

I sympathize with you, ah, most deeply—

MRS. E.

No, no, it isn't sympathy I want from you, at least

not that kind of sympathy. You said you loved me, that a thousand Harold Furnivals were nothing to you beside me. Didn't you mean that?

SIR R.

You know I did!

MRS *E.*

Then say it again! You won't? You're going to throw me over? You won't pay the price.

SIR R.

If it had been anybody but Harold! Somebody I hadn't known. But Harold—I am to see his people, his mother, his sisters—they're my friends—

MRS. E.

You don't love me then?

SIR R.

Yes, God help me, I do. I can't see anything plainly just now, but to marry you with the thought—How can you love me, having loved him as you did?

MRS. E.

You don't understand. I think every woman has two hearts to give—a girl's and a woman's. I gave him my girl's heart. But I have a woman's heart to give you. I'm not the girl who loved Harold Furnival. Oh, the woman's love is the best. Won't you take it?

SIR R.

I can't. Harold! I can't face it! There could be no happiness in it—

MRS. E.

Yes, yes. I'll take care of that. Oh, you shall be happy, I promise you. Never fear. Don't throw me over, Ralph! You see I haven't got a bit of pride. I just creep up to you and ask you to take me. Oh, I know best! We've got what so few people have. Don't let us throw it away!

SIR R.

I must. Harold? No! For your own sake, I can't.

MRS. E.

Is that all?

SIR R.

How I wish it could be otherwise!

MRS. E.

If anything had come to light about you, I should have stuck all the tighter to you because of it. It's only a woman that sticks tight to her love whatever happens. It's only a baggage like me that dares pay the price that makes love worth having.

SIR R.

If there is any way I can be your friend, let me know.

MRS. E.

Thank you, no. That's all then? I thought I deserved a little happiness at last. I suppose I don't.

SIR R.

Good-night.

MRS. E.

Good-night.

[*Exit* SIR R. *left.*

MRS. E.

Oh, you fool! You fool!

—CURTAIN—

(*One day has passed between Acts II and III.*)

ACT III

SCENE. *The same.*
TIME. *Late in the following afternoon.*
DISCOVERED. FULKS BISSETT *walking about impatiently.* LADY CARNFORTH *enters left.*

BISSETT

HAVE you seen her?

LADY C.

Yes. I've shown her it means absolute social ruin. But she's determined. She won't give her consent.

BISSETT

Then we'll do without it. That's all.

LADY C.

She's taking Violet away to-night.

BISSETT

Where?

LADY C.

I don't know. But they're going, Fulks. Fulks, she knows you may elope with Violet. She may be planning to stop it.

BISSETT

Why didn't you let me do it last night? Vi would have bolted with me from the dance.

LADY C.

Won't she now?

BISSETT

I don't know. She has cooled down this morning—wants to be married in the regulation way and make a splash with the wedding.

LADY C.

I wish it could be done that way.

BISSETT

Well, it can't.

LADY C.

I'd better tell Violet at once who Mrs. Engaine is, and get her to break off with her. Then she can stay on here, and we can have the wedding and everything as it should be.

BISSETT

How soon?

LADY C.

Say just after Christmas. We couldn't in decency have it earlier.

BISSETT

Too late, my dear girl.

LADY C.

Why?

BISSETT

Don't ask questions. You take my word Christmas will be too late.

LADY C.

Why? Fulks, tell me the truth about the necklace.

BISSETT

The necklace is all right, isn't it?

LADY C.

Yes.

BISSETT

Mrs. Engaine isn't making a fuss about it?

LADY C.

No.

BISSETT

Then don't you!

LADY C.

I needn't? You're sure? I'm hinting to everybody that Bickmore took it.

BISSETT

Jolly likely thing too. Stick to that. By the way, I haven't seen Bickmore to-day.

LADY C.

Mrs. Engaine has sent her to London.

BISSETT

What for?

LADY C.

I don't know.

BISSETT

She can't be up to any tricks? How many of them know that Mrs. Engaine is Nora Shard?

LADY C.

Only Top Bargeny. And I think Rafe.

BISSETT

Rafe knows?

LADY C.

I think from his manner she must have told him.

BISSETT

That will choke him off from marrying her?

LADY C.

Yes, I think.

BISSETT

He has got to be choked off. We don't want Rafe to make her Lady Newell, and whitewash her, do we?

LADY C.

No. Mrs. Engaine must be known as a person who cannot possibly be left with the care of Violet. That will make it easy for me to take her under my wing.

[VIOLET *enters left.*

VIO.

That naughty duckie of mine says she will leave Quarnby to-night. I'm sure you don't wish me to go—

LADY C.

No, dear. On the contrary, you must stay with me. There are very pressing reasons.

VIO.

I've told her so. I won't be packed up and bundled off I don't know where, like a pound of tea.

[BARGENY *enters left with a large bound volume of an illustrated paper, two other old numbers of illustrated papers, and two daily papers.*

BARGENY

(*Coming to* LADY C., *confidentially*)

I've got these pictures—just come down from town. You're busy? (*Glancing at* BISSETT *and* VIOLET.)

BISSETT

(*To* VIOLET)

Can you spare me a few minutes?

VIO.

Yes.

BISSETT

The lower summer house will be quiet—

VIO.

(*To* LADY C.)

Do make her see that the only possible way of managing me is to let me do exactly as I please.

[*Exeunt* BISSETT *and* VIOLET *at back.* BARGENY *has spread out the book on table and opened it to a certain place.*

BARGENY

There she is! (*Pointing out.*) Nora Shard giving evidence at the inquest on the death of Harold Furnival. (LADY C. *bends over the book.*) They've got her nose a bit out, and she looks as if she were going to pray, but that's our lady right enough, isn't it?

LADY C.

Yes. You haven't said anything about this, Top?

BARGENY

(*Solemnly*)

Not a word. Not a word. But I'm afraid we shan't be able to hush it up much longer.

LADY C.

I'm afraid not.

BARGENY

Especially as I rather fancy old Lady K. has fished out something.

LADY C.

What makes you think that?

BARGENY

From a hint or two she has dropped—and if she once gets on the warpath— [LADY K. *enters left.*

LADY K.

Well, Top, what about these pictures you sent up to London for? (BARGENY *gives her a warning look and a little hush.*) Oh nonsense! Fanny Chirk knows all about it, so you may be sure it will be in all the society papers next week. (*Coming up to table.*) Are these the pictures?

BARGENY

How did Fanny get to know?

LADY K.

(*Looking at* BARGENY)

Somebody must have told her in the strictest confidence. (*Looking at the pictures.*) Yes, that's her. Though she never could have looked like a sanctified barmaid.

[FANNY CHIRK *enters left.* LADY C. *has taken up the daily papers and is reading them.*

BARGENY

(*Looking over* LADY *K.'s shoulder*)

The coroner seems a thorough-going old blackguard.

LADY K.

Yes, he's making eyes at the barmaid.

FANNY

(*All alive*)

Coroner? Barmaid? Barmaid? Is it some interesting case?

[BARGENY throws her a look of caution and *makes her a sign.*

May I have a tiny peep?

[LADY K. *takes up one of the illustrated papers.* BARGENY *takes up the other. They move away from the table and* FANNY *bends over the volume.*

FANNY

"Scene of Harold Furnival's Death."

LADY K.

They've got her better here. She looks like a sly young madonna in mourning.

FANNY

Who? Who?

[*Looking around at* BARGENY *for a cue.*

BARGENY

Looks as if she wanted to poison him in this one.

FANNY

Poison who? Do tell me who's going to be poisoned. (*Again stealing a look at* BARGENY *and asking for instructions.*)

LADY K.

Don't pretend you don't know, Miss Chirk, when you're dishing it all up for next week's "Butterfly."

FANNY

Dishing what up?

LADY K.

What Mr. Bargeny has told you in the strictest confidence. What he told me in the strictest confidence. What he has told everybody in the strictest confidence.

BARGENY

I've told everybody? !

LADY K.

Yes, Top.

[STACKPOOL *enters left.*

LADY K.

Here's Harry. You've told him all about it—in the strictest confidence, hasn't he, Harry?

[STACKPOOL *looks at* BARGENY *for a cue.* BARGENY *gives him a sign.*

STACK.

All about what?

LADY K.

What everybody in the house is talking about. Don't try to look innocent, Harry. You can't—

BARGENY

Well, if the cat is out of the bag—

LADY K.

The question is where she'll run to.

FANNY

(*Reading*)

"Miss Shard giving her evidence at the inquest."

STACK.

We needn't have another inquest on Miss Shard, or Mrs. Engaine, or whoever she is, need we?

LADY K.

No, but we ought to find out the moral. I do love a story with a moral.

STACK.

Oh, the moral's very plain. In all elopements avoid collisions with runaway horses, *and* husbands, *and the* daily papers.

BARGENY

That's what I tell all my friends. It don't much matter what you do. Good Lord, we aren't particular! But for heaven's sake, don't go and get yourself talked about in the papers.

FANNY

I do feel so sorry for her. I suppose you wouldn't mind my having a neat little paragraph in the "Butterfly," Lady Carnforth?

LADY C.

Not this week, please. Let her get quite away from Quarnby. After that you may say—whatever is necessary.

FANNY

But, dear Lady Carnforth, do you think we shall be able to keep it quiet for a week?

LADY K.

I'm sure we shan't.

LADY C.

I can't have a scandal coming from Quarnby.

FANNY

Of course she'll be leaving?

LADY C.

Certainly. She'll go this evening.

FANNY

I do feel so sorry for her. How would you wish it to be put in the "Butterfly"?

LADY C.

I'll talk it over with you bye and bye.

BARGENY

Well, it's jolly hard lines on her to have it raked up again after all these years, eh, Harry?

STACK.

Oh, my point of view is entirely that of the British juryman. If the woman is ugly I find her guilty. If she's pretty I let her off, and want to marry her.

FANNY

I suppose Sir Rafe won't marry her now?

BARGENY

Oh, he can't. Rafe is very straight in all such matters.

LADY C.

It's impossible for anyone to marry her now, especially if there is going to be another big scandal about her. And that seems inevitable.

FANNY

Quite inevitable, I'm afraid. I'm so sorry for her. I suppose we shan't be able to know her in the future?

LADY K.

I'm never quite sure who are the people I mustn't know. (*To Fanny.*) Couldn't you bring out an annual directory of them, my dear? Call it "The Shady Who's Who," or "People One Mustn't Know." It would be so handy.

FANNY

I'm afraid I should have to put Mrs. Engaine into it. I do feel so sorry for her. I wonder if I might hint there had been an engagement between Sir Rafe and her—(*Looking questioningly at* LADY C.)

LADY C.

Oh, it's sure to get about they were engaged, and Rafe as a man of honor had to break it off.

FANNY

Yes. I'll put it very delicately so as not to hurt her feelings. I wonder what will become of her?

BARGENY

Oh, straight she goes into the "Shady Who's Who" and stays there for the rest of her life.

[*Outside on the terrace there is the noise of a chair being moved and then placed down angrily.* SIR RAFE *appears at the window and comes in.*

SIR R.

I've been obliged to hear all you've said. I was sitting outside reading the paper, and I couldn't help myself. Elinor, Lady Katherine, Miss Chirk, you're all women, and there's nothing to be done with you except to let you say what you like, and do all the mischief you can to a woman who's a thundering deal better than half the pack you're meeting every day of your lives. Miss Chirk, I can't stop you from sending up any malicious gossip you please about Mrs. Engaine. But you may tell your editor if he publishes it he'll have a very tough job on his hands. I've got a longish purse and a thickish arm. And they're ready for him or for any other man who can't keep his tongue off this business.

BARGENY

A thousand pardons, my dear Rafe—hadn't the least idea you were listening.

FANNY

We were just saying how sorry we are for her.

SIR R.

Would you kindly let your sorrow hold its tongue?

LADY C.

Don't make yourself ridiculous, Rafe! Read what the papers said about her at the time. (*Offering him the paper she has been reading.*)

SIR R.

Thank you. I've heard what you've all been saying to-day.

LADY C.

(*Pressing paper on him*)

But read it, my dear Rafe, and see what's in store for you if you try to whitewash her. You surely don't mean to drag your name and your family into that connection.

SIR R.

(*Refusing paper*)

I'm not going to drag my family into any connections. I'm going to leave them with the connections they've already got.

LADY C.

Thank you.

SIR R.

I'm off back to town to-morrow morning, if you don't mind.

LADY C.

Oh, certainly!

SIR R.

I begin to long for the company of the blackguards and scoundrels I left out in Argentina.

[*Exit left.*

[*They all look round at each other.* MARSH *appears at the veranda window.*

MARSH

Tea is on the terrace, your ladyship.

[*Exit* MARSH.

BARGENY

(*Rubbing his hands cordially*)

Well after Rafe's little flare-up, what do you say to tea and hot cakes?

FANNY

I'm simply dying for a cup (*to* LADY C.) Sir Rafe won't really marry her, will he?

LADY C.

I think not. Perhaps after all we'd better arrange to have our version of this affair made public at once.

FANNY

I think it will be best. It's sure to be all out in a few days.

LADY C.

I'll see you presently.

[*Enter* MRS. CHINNERY *left.*

MRS. C.

(*Very dignified, very indignant*)

Lady Carnforth, can I speak to you?

[*Looking daggers at* STACKPOOL.

LADY C.

Certainly dear. Lady K., will you pour out the tea for me?

LADY K.

If Top will promise not to talk scandal.

BARGENY

No. I'll sit at your feet and humbly listen to you.

[*Exeunt* LADY K. *and* BARGENY *at back.*

FANNY

(*To Lady C.*)

You won't forget the post goes ont at seven. And I must catch it. Though I'm awfully sorry for her. Really and truly I am.

[*Exit* FANNY *back.* STACKPOOL *and* MRS. *have been talking apart.* MRS. C. *is very angry.* STACKPOOL *has been expostulating and try to calm her down.*

MRS. C.

No! It's too disgraceful! I won't forgive you! I'm determined! It's shameful!

[STACKPOOL *looks at* LADY C. *and shrugs his shoulders.*

LADY C.

You wished to speak to me, dear?

MRS. C.

(*Looking angrily at them*)

Yes. I leave Quarnby tonight. You know the reason. I needn't say any more.

LADY C.

I'm sorry. Still if you must go—

STACK.

(*In a low voice to* MRS. C.)

Don't be a fool, Alice—

MRS. C.

I have been one. I've finished. I leave my position for any one who wishes to be a fool in my place.

[*Looks angrily at* LADY C. *and exit left.*

STACK.

(*Going after her*)

One moment, Alice—

LADY C.

Do you think she'll make a fuss?

STACK.

Oh no. Poor dear! She's fearfully in debt just now. I'll see she keeps quiet.

LADY C.

You're sure?

STACK.

Quite. I'll make it all right. There's nothing to fear!

[*Exit left.* LADY C. *looks after him.* BISSETT *enters on veranda.*

BISSETT

Landed her I think, if you'll put the finishing touches

LADY C.

Finishing touches?

BISSETT

I've told her that something has turned up about Mrs. Engaine and I've made out it's pretty awful. Now you go and let out about Nora Shard. Make her see she can't stay on with Mrs. Engaine. Then she'll hop off to a Registrar's office with me and we can come back here and spend the honeymoon. How's that for a smart bit of business?

LADY C.

Yes, that will do, I think.

BISSETT

She's waiting for you in the lower summer house.

[MRS. ENGAINE *enters left in travelling dress.*

LADY C.

You've quite made up your mind to go?

MRS. E.

Oh yes. Violet and I will go by the six fifteen and take what we want for the night. Bickmore can bring the rest of our luggage up tomorrow morning.

LADY C.

So sorry if you're obliged to go. I'll order the motor.

MRS. E.

If you'll be so good. Where is Violet?

LADY C.

They're having tea on the lawn. I expect she's with them.

[*Exit at window.*

BISSETT

Won't you have some tea before you go?

MRS. E.

No, thank you.

BISSETT

I don't think you've treated me quite fairly.

MRS. E.

No?

BISSETT

You'll be sorry when you find out what a good chap I am, and what a devoted husband I make.

MRS. E.

We must wait for that, mustn't we?

BISSETT

Not very long, I think. Violet means to have me. Don't you think you'd better give in? (*She looks at him*) You're in a pretty tight place, you know—

MRS. E.

(*Looks at him*)

Am I?

BISSETT

Well aren't you? There's going to be a pretty stir over this business. But we don't want to take Violet away from you, if it can be avoided—

MRS. E.

Thank you.

BISSETT

My sister wants to help you out—don't you think you'd better leave it in her hands?

MRS. E.

I'm afraid not.

BISSETT

(*Chagrined*)

All right. Then here goes for tea.

[*Exit at Veranda.* MRS. E. *follows him up a step or two, catches sight of the book and papers on table, goes up to them, looks at the open book, shudders, starts away, goes back to table, forces herself to take up one of the illustrated papers,*

shows great pain, puts it back on the table. Enter BICKMORE *left with a small handbag.*

MRS. E.

Well Bickmore?

BICK.

I took it up and asked to see Mr. Goss himself. (*Taking necklace out of bag*) He looked at it and smiled and said, "Just wait a few minutes". When he came back, he said, "Tell Mrs. Engaine this isn't her necklace at all. This thing isn't worth a ten pound note."

[MRS. ENGAINE *has taken the necklace from* BICKMORE.

MRS. E.

Thank you, Bickmore. You won't speak about this?

BICK.

No, ma'am. I came down in the train with Mr. Toller. He kept on chatting about it.

MRS. E.

Did he?

BICK.

Yes ma'am. And when we got out at the station, he says, "Tell Mrs. Engaine I want to see her privately."

MRS. E.

Where is he?

BICK.

I don't know ma'am.

MRS. E.

Very well, Bickmore. Now please go upstairs and pack all our things. Miss Engaine and I are leaving this evening.

BICK.

Are we leaving Quarnby for good, ma'am?

MRS. E.

Yes.

BICK.

Because I'm going to have it out with Lady Carnforth before I go.

MRS. E.

Have what out?

BICK.

She's telling everybody that I took the necklace. Turrell says she's setting it about everywhere.

MRS. E.

Who's Turrell?

BICK.

Mrs. Chinnery's maid.

MRS. E.

We're leaving. You'd better take no notice of it.

BICK.

I'm going to take notice of it, ma'am. I don't want to have a row, but if a row has got to come, why come it shall, and a jolly big row it shall be. And Lord Carnforth shall be in it—I'll take care of that.

MRS. E.

What has Lord Carnforth to do with it?

BICK.

Turrell and I have seen—what we have seen, and if Lady Carnforth is going to take away my character I'm going to take away hers. Tit for tat, my Lady Carnforth!

MRS. E.

Hush, Bickmore!

BICK.

No, ma'am I'm not going to hush. Either Lady Carnforth takes back what she has said about me and apologises, or let her look out, that's all.

MRS. E.

What are you going to do?

BICK.

I shall tell Lord Carnforth all about her carrying on with Stackpool.

MRS. E.

You mustn't do that, Bickmore.

BICK.

Oh yes, I must ma'am, begging your pardon. Turrell will back me up. We can open his Lordship's eyes, and we can make her blush scarlet, if she's got a blush left in her. I'll teach her. Where is she? I'll have it out with her in front of all of them.

[*Going towards window.*

MRS. E.

Bickmore, if you do this, I can't keep you in my service.

BICK.

I should be sorry to leave you ma'am, but slander is slander, and holy wedlock is holy wedlock, no matter who connives at it, and I'm going to see that justice is done, both to myself and Lord Carnforth.

MRS. E.

You'd better leave it to me, Bickmore.

BICK.

What to do, ma'am?

MRS. E.

I'll ask Lady Carnforth to take back what she has said—I'm sure she will.

BICK.

And apologise, ma'am. I mean to have her down on her marrow bones.

MRS. E.

Will you go and pack now and leave this till I've seen Lady Carnforth? Please. You won't disgrace me, Bickmore, by making a scene? Please.

BICK.

Very well, ma'am. But you tell her ladyship, I've got her on toast, as they say, and before I let her off, she's got to go down on her marrow bones.

[*Exit left.*

[MRS. ENGAINE *examines the necklace carefully.* TOLLER *looks in cautiously at window and enters.*

MRS. E.

Mr. Toller!

TOLLER

Good afternoon, ma'am. (*Looking at the necklace in her hand*) Well, ma'am, about that pretty article?

MRS. E.

Have you learned anything?

TOLLER

Yes ma'am. Something it might be very much to your advantage to know.

MRS. E.

Please tell me.

TOLLER

Of course, ma'am, it's understood you are employing me. Otherwise, I might not feel myself at liberty to divulge—

MRS. E.

Consider that I'm employing you.

TOLLER

And you being a very wealthy lady, I suppose there will no dispute about terms?

MRS. E.

It's quite impossible I could have any dispute with you, Mr. Toller.

TOLLER

Of course not. I mention it because the means I have to employ are a leetle sub rosa. And therefore expensive.

(*Watching her*)

MRS. E.

You will be paid whatever you ask. What do you know?

TOLLER

(*Looking around cautiously and speaking in a whisper*)

Mr. Fulks Bissett took a valuable pearl necklace worth two thousand pounds to the Natural Pearl Company in Regent Street on Monday morning. He got them to fake up one just like it (*touching the pearl necklace in her hand*) for which he paid them twenty-one pounds. He took both necklaces away from them yesterday afternoon.

MRS. E.

What has become of mine?

TOLLER

He drove straight from the Pearl Company to Mr. Lewis Bernstein's, a money-lender. He stayed there ten minutes and then he drove to Paddington and caught the train down here. So I fancy you'll find your necklace in Mr. Lewis Bernstein's safe.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

TOLLER

I'll follow it up when I get back to town, and I shall soon be able to put my hands on it.

MRS. E.

Please, no.

TOLLER

Don't you wish me to follow it up, ma'am?

MRS. E.

Not at present. Will you wait in the hall a little while?

[*Indicating door left*

TOLLER

Well ma'am, I'm not supposed to be here—

MRS. E.

I understood that I am employing you?

TOLLER

Yes, of course, ma'am.

MRS. E.

Please to wait in the hall till I send for you.

[*Opening door left.*

TOLLER

Certainly ma'am.

[*Exit left, closing door*)

[MRS. ENGAINE *looks at the necklace carefully and shuts it in bag. She walks about in deep thought..* VIOLET *enters hastily at window.*

VIO.

Duckie, Lady Carnforth has told me. Oh, I'm so sorry for you! But you know I shall stick to you whoever you are!

MRS. E.

God bless you, dear. (*Kissing her*)

VIO.

It won't make a bit of difference to me.

MRS. E.

Are you sure?

VIO.

Quite. You'll always be my dear old duckie. (MRS. E. *kisses her again.*) But, my dear old duckie has got to be sensible and let Lady Carnforth help her out.

MRS. E.

She has talked you round and persuaded you—

VIO.

No, no. Now don't be a silly, naughty, obstinate duckie! You must see your only way out is to let Lady Carnforth take you up, while I marry Fulks, and you marry Sir Ralph.

MRS. E.

I can't marry Sir Ralph.

VIO.

Oh, yes. I've watched him looking at you.

MRS. E.

No—he knows. He won't have me. He has thrown me over!

VIO.

That is mean! If Fulks had done anything wrong I should love him all the more for it!

MRS. E.

Would you? (*Looks at her*). Yes, I suppose you would. Violet, I want you to trust me—

VIO.

I don't mean to give up Fulks.

MRS. E.

Trust me. Vi, I might have been happy, I might have had it all, Sir Rafe, you, my reputation, everything if I had listened to Lady Carnforth. But I wouldn't do it. I couldn't do it. I had to go straight, just because I must. I knew it would be best for you, and best for me in the end to go straight. So I did it. I've thrown it all over. Now, I want you to trust me, and go away with me for a little while.

VIO.

Go away. Where?

MRS. E.

Anywhere. I've got to hide my head, I suppose, all my life. But you have all your life to come. I won't spoil your chances dear, I won't stand in your way. After a year you shall come back to England and I'll find some nice woman to bring you out and take care of you.

VIO.

I shan't give up Fulks.

MRS. E.

You've only known him for a few weeks. You'll have time to make sure you love him, and he'll have time to show he is worthy of you.

VIO.

I'm sure he is.

MRS. E.

This will prove it. For the sake of your happiness all your life, give me a year. You'll be only eighteen when you come back. I want you, dear. I'm broken. I'm done. Don't leave me. I'm all alone. He'll have nothing to do with me. Don't you throw me over as he has done! Oh, don't throw me over, Vi!

VIO.

(*Passionately*)

I won't! I won't! (*passionately embracing* MRS. E.)

[LADY CARNFORTH *enters from Veranda.*

LADY C.

I hope you have persuaded Mrs. Engaine she has no alternative.

MRS. E.

(*To* VIO.)

You'll do as I wish, dear?

VIO.

Yes, I'll come up to London with you.

MRS. E.

Ah, I knew you would. (*taking* VIOLET *left*)

LADY C.

(*Going toward* VIO)

Violet, remember your promise.

MRS. E.

(*Intercepting*)

No, please Lady Carnforth. (*To* VIO.) Make haste and get ready, dear.

[*Puts* VIO *off left.*

LADY C.

You know what construction will be put on your leaving Quarnby?

MRS. E.

Tell me.

LADY C.

That certain facts of your history having come to light I was obliged to—

MRS. E.

To turn me out?

LADY C.

To ask you to leave Quarnby at once.

MRS. E.

That's what you intend to say?

LADY C.

Something like it.

MRS. E.

Very well, say it. And say that I never denied those facts. Say that when I loved a man I was proud of it, and was ready to give my life and reputation into his hands, freely and openly before all the world. I didn't soil a husband's honour and hoodwink him, while all my friends and servants were gossiping about it!

LADY C.

(*Flushes up with great resentment and is about to reply angrily, but controls herself*)

Really my dear, if I had a story like yours, I wouldn't brag about it.

MRS. E.

I'd rather brag about a real love than cover up a casual little intrigue.

LADY C.

Very well, my dear. You prefer a scandal about your affairs. I prefer to keep silence about mine.

MRS. E.

Will that be possible?

LADY C.

What do you mean?

MRS. E.

I'm afraid Bickmore has noticed something.

LADY C.

Noticed something, what?

MRS. E.

She's naturally angry that you have accused her of taking my necklace and she threatens to go to Lord Carnforth and tell him what she has seen.

LADY C.

(*With great indignation*)

You've set Bickmore to spy on me.

MRS. E.

(*Looks at her for a moment with great contempt*)

You're a very bad judge of character, Lady Carnforth. I'm doing all I can to keep Bickmore quiet.

LADY C.

The wretch! You'll surely make her hold her tongue.

MRS. E.

I've done all I can, but I can't move her. I think you'd better see her yourself and come to some understanding with her. If you don't, I'm afraid she'll make a scene before your guests.

LADY C.

Very well, I'll see her. But you mustn't expect that Fulks will give up Violet.

MRS. E.

I think he will.

LADY C

I'm sure he won't, whatever happens. Ah! here he is. (FULKS *enters at window*) I was just telling Mrs. Engaine that in any case you won't give up Violet?

BISSETT

Quite impossible. Quite out of the question, my dear Mrs. Engaine.

MRS. E.

Then I'm afraid I must give you in custody for stealing my necklace.

[LADY C. *and* BISSETT *show great fright.* BISSETT *tries to pass it off.*

BISSETT

Oh, come, you're joking.

MRS. E.

Not at all.

LADY C.

Fulks, this isn't true!

BISSETT

(*To* MRS. E.)

What makes you think—?

MRS. E.

(*Taking bag off table and bringing out the necklace*)

You took my necklace to a Company in Regent Street on Monday and got them to make an imitation one. On Tuesday you got them both from the Company. You left mine with some money lender and you brought this back to Quarnby.

LADY C.

You didn't do it, Fulks! Why don't you deny it?

BISSETT

What's the use? She's got me right enough. All right, I'll give up Violet, if you'll let me off.

MRS. E.

That's all I wish. (*Puts necklace in bag, fastens it, puts bag on table near* BARGENY'S *books.*) Please write me a letter confessing that you took my necklace.

BISSETT

Oh, I can't do that, you know—

MRS. E.

Mr. Toller is in the hall waiting my instructions. You won't force me to call him in?

BISSETT

Oh, very well. What use are you going to make of the letter?

MRS. E.

None whatever, unless you try to see Violet. Write me that in consideration of my not prosecuting you, you give up all pretensions to Miss Engaine. Then write to her saying that you find you don't love her, and that you are called away abroad for some months.

BISSETT

Rather rough on Violet, ain't it?

MRS. E.

I think, quite the reverse. Do it at once, please.

[BISSETT *hesitates for some seconds, then goes to writing table, seats himself and write.*

MRS. E.

Mr. Toller will go with you from here and take a month or two's tour with you on the continent at my expense.

BISSETT

(*Writing*)

No, thank you. I don't see myself chumming with Tollers.

MRS. E.

I must be sure you are not near Violet. You prefer Mr. Toller to—

BISSETT

(*Writing*)

All right, I'll take on Toller.

LADY C.

(*Who has shown great humiliation*)

I may rely you won't let this be known?

MRS. E.

Not unless Mr. Bissett forces me.

LADY C.

Thank you. And if I can be of any use to you—

MRS. E.

In what way?

LADY C.

In Society.

MRS. E.

Thank you, no. Violet and I will be away from England for a long while. You might perhaps say as little of me as possible.

LADY C.

At least, I'll take care that your leaving Quarnby is put in the best light.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

[BISSETT *has written two letters; brings them to* MRS. E.

BISSETT

I think that fixes it up, don't it? (MRS. E. *takes letters, reads them.*) Some folks might think I was a bit of an outsider for this. But you see I was in a beastly mess and I thought if I could borrow your necklace for a few months and marry Violet meantime, I could put it back before anybody missed it. I didn't think there was any harm in borrowing it.

MRS. E.

(*Glancing at him*)

No, you wouldn't.

BISSETT

I assure you I didn't. If I thought there had been anything wrong in borrowing it I shouldn't have done it. Is that what you want? (*Pointing to letters.*)

MRS. E.

Yes, they will do.

LADY C.

But the real necklace, Fulks? Can't you get it back?

BISSETT

I'm afraid I can't, unless I produce it's value in cash, and I —(*turns pitcously towards* MRS. E. *with an imploring look*)

MRS. E.

Pray, keep it.

BISSETT

I say that's jolly good of you. Awfully good.

MRS. E.

So long as you stay away from Violet.

BISSETT

Oh, I give you my word, my word of honor. I suppose I'd better cut it? Where would you like me to go?

MRS. E.

Anywhere you please, so long as Mr. Toller is constantly with you.

BISSETT

I say, can't you cut Toller out?

MRS. E.

You might have much worse company. I'll give him instructions to make things as comfortable as possible for you.

BISSETT

(*To* LADY C.) Good-bye, old girl. (*Offers to embrace her;* LADY C. *refuses*). This about finishes me.

[*Exit at window.*

LORD CARNFORTH *enters left.*

LORD C.

So you're going, Mrs. Engaine?

MRS. E.

Yes, Lord Carnforth.

LORD C.

I hope you've had a pleasant visit.

MRS. E.

Very pleasant.

LORD C.

You must come and see us again.

MRS. E.

Thank you.

[LADY K. *and* BARGENY *have entered from veranda.*

LADY K.

My dear Mrs. Engaine, so you've really made up your mind to leave us?

MRS. E.

Yes, Lady Katherine.

[*Going to table to take up the bag,* BARGENY *suddenly sees the books and papers he has left on table; makes a gesture of annoyance at his forgetfulness in having left them, makes a move to pick them up, glances at* MRS. E. *who is at the table taking up her bag; they look at each other.* SIR RAFE *enters left; and sees the look between them.*

SIR R.

Elinor, I've made up my mind to go to-night instead of tomorrow morning. Can I have the motor for the six-fifteen?

LADY C.

Yes, if—(*glancing at* MRS. E.) That's the train Mrs. Engaine is taking—unless I can persuade her to stay. Won't you stay a few days longer? I wish it very much. (*Very emphatically.*) Will you oblige me?

[SIR R., LADY K. *and* BARGENY *look very much surprised.*

MRS. E.

I think not. (*Looking at* BARGENY'S *books and papers which he has gathered up.*)

BARGENY

(*Looks confused*)

Oh, I assure you, I—a—(*looks confused*)—I—merely—

LADY C.

(*To* LADY K.)

Won't you help me persuade Mrs. Engaine?

LADY K.

Certainly, if there is any way in which I can help Mrs. Engaine—

SIR R.

I don't think Mrs. Engaine needs any help, Lady K. (*To* MRS. E.) Do you mind my coming up in the six-fifteen with you?

MRS. E.

(*Showing great delight*)

I shall be pleased, if you wish—

[FANNY CHIRK *enters at window.*

SIR R.

And may I just say that you've promised to come out to Argentina with me as my wife?

[*A great rush of emotion stops* MRS. E. *from speaking—she puts her hand in his, her face glowing with emotion.* VIOLET *in outdoor dress enters left.*

SIR R.

Miss Chirk, will you please announce that my marriage with Mrs. Engaine will take place privately in London and that we leave by the very next boat for Buenos Ayres? Elinor, will you order the motor?

VIOLET

Duckie, I'm so glad! [*Embracing* MRS. E.

MRS. E.

(*Turns to* SIR R., *overcome with emotion*)

I can't—I can't—say anything—oh, you shall never regret this—never—

CURTAIN

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